

## Nothing But Trouble

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## Nothing But Trouble

by [Siriusfanatic](#)

### Summary

Hector's life has taken a turn for the worst in the last month as he finds himself once more in the same helpless position that he began life in. He's through with pirates and pirating and would like nothing better than to just get back to Nassau in search of his missing parents, until fortune turns again putting him directly in the path of young Jack Sparrow.

### Notes

\*\* Takes place 4 years after Son of Irish Seas, which you can find among my other pirate fics

# Chapter 1

A day in Tortuga could last a sailor a life time, for the seedy port was brimming with pirates and criminals of all manners, teeming together in the humid Caribbean air trying to outwit and outlast not only their numerous enemies, but each other as well. The opportunities for adventure and disaster were equal in measure and plentiful for all. But a month in the salt crusted port had left one sailor in worse shape than he had arrived.

That morning, Hector woke, stiff and aching, huddled into the back corner of a building, sheltered from the sun and the rain and any prying eyes by a discarded bit of broken wood that he had propped over him to make a lean-to. His clothes were dirty and worn, stiff with salt and sweat. His stomach rumbled with lack of sustenance, followed by the immediate queasy feeling from too much drink.

As his head cleared from the fog of his dream, he came to recognize the hell he had become so acquainted with over these long weeks, and was again reminded that this pitiless existence was his punishment for daring too much, for wanting more than fate had allotted him. Sao...how could Sao do this to him?

It was a question he had asked himself countless times but never found the answer to. It went around and around in his skull like a churning melody he couldn't forget, one moment blaming himself and the next blaming his former lover. But Hector knew he had brought this upon himself...Sao had given him everything, helped to shape him into the man he was. He'd be lost long ago were not for the other man's kindness that saved him from drowning, and again from the quatermaster's lash...Sao had loved him. And Hector had repaid that love with ungratefulness. If he had just listened...done as he was told, stopped trying to go off on his own.

If he gave up his freedom, he would have had everything.

"Damn him..." he muttered, scrubbing his hands across his burning eyes in a bitter, exhausted manner, feeling an angry sob attempt to crawl up his throat. But he swallowed it back down, hard.

After a few moments of convincing himself, the ragged man managed to find enough will to crawl from his spot and stand, stretching his stiff muscles and taking in the lay of the land. The sun had been up for hours already, but wasn't high in the sky quite yet. The port was often slow and quiet at this hour, as a good deal of its residents were still sleeping off the night before.

He moved from the cloistered back lot of the blacksmith's shop and made his way up the alley towards the main road. From this spot on the hill he could look down and see the whole of the harbor and all the ships that had docked there during wee hours of the night. There were not many to speak of, mostly the same few that had been lingering there for a week or more already and handful of smaller boats that had swept in under the cover of fog. These most likely belonged to defectors and escapees from naval and merchant ships, as Tortuga was one of the few places that provided refuge for them.

One ship caught Hector's eye then. This one was a mighty galleon, baring a Jolly Roger that he had seen on the horizon from time to time, but never up close. The Captain was rumored to be one of the fabled Brethren Court, the Pirates that controlled various parts of the ocean as keepers of The Code.

He kept his eyes on the ship for a moment, then turned away with a sneer and walked up the road. Keepers of The Code be damned; he had seen just exactly how much said "code" meant to them. A loose set of bylaws and declarations that were swept aside whenever it was deemed fit to. He had no more time for such things.

His stomach clenched and rolled again and as he walked he suppressed a wave of dizziness that threatened to put him on his face in the mud. He caught himself on the corner of a building and doubled over, spitting onto the ground as he tried to vomit, but his stomach had nothing to give up but bile and water.

It only made the hunger pains worse and the destitute sailor cursed and whimpered quietly to himself as he struggled for control. How had he come to this? Wasn't it just a few short weeks ago he was first mate aboard one of the most feared vessels in the South China Sea. He had fought sea creatures, seen the green flash at world's end, and even lived to tell the tale of a kraken encounter. His name was feared in those ports off China, Japan and Malaysia. But now, here he stood...abandoned and cast off from the only world he'd ever felt at home in. Even as an outsider.

Finally gathering his composure and wiping his mouth on his sleeve, the red head struggled to steady his breathing as well as his shaking knees and reached inside his belt, feeling the handle of his pistol there. Not for the first time in these long weeks did he consider turning the barrel upon himself and being done with it all.

But he stopped, frowning at the idea. That would be just what Sao wanted, to know that he couldn't survive on his own, that his life wasn't worth living without him. That he was just as useless and helpless as his former lover had come to make him feel over their last few months of their partnership. And Hector wasn't about to give that self-important bastard the satisfaction of being right.

Someone knocked against him then, nearly sending him forward onto his knees. "Dah! Watch where yer goin'!" he snapped, turning to look at the offender, only to see him shuffle hurriedly past him without looking back.

Hector sneered again and righted himself, checking his pockets and then stiffened when he felt that the last of his coins had been lifted from his belt. "Son of a bitch!" He took off at a run after the man ahead of him.

The pick-pocket of course, sensed that he had been caught in the act, and was now dashing through the more heavily crowded market ahead, with the younger pirate bellowing after him. Although here and there passerby's would stop to gander at the skeptical, none lifted a finger to assist. There were no laws against such crimes in Tortuga, it was every pirate for themselves. Disputes, robberies and other offenses were handled between crews and their captains, and poor Hector, with neither, had only himself to rely on.

The pick pocket was sure that he had lost Hector in the throng, and paused in a narrow alley way to look over his spoils. The pock-faced man, with a shock of greasy black hair and only a handful of teeth left, opened the top of the small leather coin purse to find there were only two sad shillings inside, not even enough to buy a watery pint of rum.

He groaned in disgust, thinking *he* was the one that had been had, until a pair of fists

grabbed him by the collar of his coat, yanked him around and shoved him against the wall, a gun barrel forced up against his nose.

“Oy! Easy with that!”

“You picked the wrong mark,” the paler man muttered, leering up at him with glassy, blood shot blue eyes, “Give it back and I won’t open an extra hole in that thick skull of yers,”

The pick-pocket chortled and tossed the coin purse to the ground at his feet. “Here, take it. Waste of my time, honestly.”

Keeping the gun trained on him, Hector reached to grab it before someone else could. But this move was an immediate mistake, for the next moment the man had lifted his knee and brought it up harshly into Hector’s gut.

With a cry, the man toppled backward, only to have the pick-pocket grab him by the shoulders and slam his head into the cobble stones. The blow knocked him dizzy, making the world around him spin and blink in and out of view as he laid sprawled there. Rough, dirty hands were patting him down, shifting through his clothing for more valuables that might have been missed. He groaned, trying to push the man away, only to have his hand snatched forward, his wrist twisted sharply, making him cry out again.

“Ooh, would you look at that! How’d I miss this little pretty before?” The man was eyeing the large jade dragon crested ring on his hand. He pulled it off and turned it over in his grasp. “Now this! This is a bauble worth fightin’ over, boy! Fetch a nice price to the right buyer, real jade is hard to come by and this crest...belongs to a pirate lord, does it not?” He grinned, showing more of his remaining rotten teeth and blackened gums. “Bit a thief yourself eh?”

Hector was pushing himself up again, though his head was spinning, fumbling for his lost weapon. “Give it here, or I’ll—“

“You’ll *what* exactly?” The man knocked him flat again and put his foot over his throat, pressing down so that Hector had to grapple and push back to keep his throat from being crushed. “No one’s coming to save ya, lad.”

Then, quite abruptly, the man’s weight shifted back and Hector realized he wasn’t about to be murdered. He looked up in surprise to find his assailant tugged awkwardly backward, a deeply tan arm thrown around his throat and a glittering knife point pressed harshly to the soft place beneath his chin.

“That’ll do there, mate. Now I think that you ought to be givin’ my friend back his ring, savvy?”

Hector wriggled his way out from under the mugger’s boot, getting to his feet as gracefully as he could muster and aimed the pistol once more at his attacker’s face. But his eyes shifted to the newcomer, who continued to hold the fiend at knife point. He was shorter in stature than Hector, and indeed much shorter than their captive. He had a head of thick, wild black hair, and a short goatee that framed his mouth in the same ebony shade. His eyes were dark, but bright with a sort of impish delight, and across his forehead was a wide swath of scarlet that just managed to keep the bushy tangle of hair out of his eyes.

He’d never seen the man before, but that wasn’t so rare at the frequency ships came and went. Yet the other acted as though they were old chums.

“Alright mate?” the other man asked, eyes briefly meeting Hector’s as he attempted to keep the squirming man in front of him still.

Hector nodded mutely in reply and reached out and snatched his ring back from the scrawny thief’s hand, returning it to its proper place on his own.

“Good! Now then, how about you scuttle back to whatever rock you crawled out from under, and my friend and I will let you keep your head, eh?”

“A-Aye!”

The dark-haired man released him with a shove, and the pick-pocket scrambled away at a run, cursing and spitting as he went. Hector watched him for a moment, and then glanced curiously back to his new companion, who was looking rather pleased with himself.

He chuckled and nudged Hector with his elbow, showing that he had in fact picked the pick-pocket’s own purse, which appeared to be nearly full to bursting. “I think that poor blighter isn’t quite done learning his lesson just yet. Sure he’ll be cursing the pair of us even more when he realizes that he’s just bought a round of drinks.”

“Who the hell are you?” Hector muttered, not letting go of his weapon and looking him up and down as if trying to make sense of him.

The man next to him looked mildly aghast and then grinned charmingly, “Why my dear man, you see before you the terror of the Caribbean, the elusive and illustrious prince of the seas, Jack Sparrow?”

He seemed to think that Hector would at once recognize his name, but the red head merely blinked and continued to frown for a moment before shaking his head. “Ne’er heard of ya, sorry.” He muttered.

The youth deflated a little, his charming devilish grin fading into a look of mild dismay, his large dark eyes widening in a way that was almost as endearing as it was pitiful. “Oh.” He mumbled, then shook off his disappointment and looped his arm around Hector’s. “Well, now you have! And I must say it is your lucky day, considering the scrape you were in. Lucky I happened along when I did.”

The taller man shook him off, not wanting to be touched by the over enthusiastic youth. “Aye, but yer help weren’t necessary. I had ‘im right where I wanted ‘im.”

Jack blinked at him a moment and then began to shake with laughter, much to Hector’s chagrin. “Oh really? Well, apologizes if I intruded upon your clever plan to get yerself murdered in broad day light. I was considering sharing this loot with you, but since you don’t need my help, I’ll just be taking it for my trouble...”

Hector reached out and grabbed the man by the shoulder, cocking the pistol at him this time.

“Ah,” Jack said quietly, though he didn’t particularly look worried. “I thought that might be the case.”

“Listen here, whelp, I don’t need any charity from the likes of a pompous little blow fish like yourself...” but the words had no sooner fumbled their way to his lips when his vision began to swim again, his stomach clenched around nothing, and his head throbbed violently. He watched as Jack’s eyes went from vaguely amused to alarmed as his knees gave out and he sunk towards the cobblestones.

As his gun clattered from his hand, the smaller man reached under his arms and caught him, keeping him from dashing his skull against the rocks again. “Oy! Easy there! What’s the matter with you?”

Jack grappled with the taller, lankier man until he got his arm around his waist, pulling Hector’s limp arm around his shoulder and carried nearly fainted man further down the alley until they were firmly out of the sun. He eased the wilting sailor down on an old crate just outside the back door of a small tavern, who’s door had been left ajar to allow the steam and heat from the kitchens out.

He propped the limp man against the wall and then turned hurriedly to the open door, ducking his head inside, shouting something that Hector didn’t quite catch in his dazed, hazy state. There were several moments of muffled arguing, followed by a woman screeching and the clangs of pots and pans and then Jack reappeared, clutching a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water as a rather disgruntled chicken flapped over his head. “Alright, alright! You don’t have to be so bloody *rude* about it! And I never laid a hand on her, I’ll have you know!” he shouted back to someone inside.

Hector tried to push himself to his feet again, but the tan skinned sailor’s hand came against his chest and pressed him back, moving to sit on the crate next to him. “Steady as she goes, mate. Yer not goin’ anywhere like this, ‘cept maybe to an early grave. Have a drink.”

He held the pitcher up to Hector and helped him tip it back, watching him guzzle it greedily like a man dying of thirst. He drank the lot of it without hardly coming up for a breath, and when he was finished he laid back, more exhausted than before, but seeming to have revived all the same.

“Better?”

“Aye...” Hector mumbled thickly.

Jack broke the bread in half and handed him his piece. “Go on. From the look of you, you need it.”

The other man accepted it hesitantly, for a moment fearing that this was some sort of trick on the other man’s behalf. But maybe it was Jack’s smile, or Hector’s own apparent starvation, but his needs outweighed his fear at that moment, and he tore into the bread like a ravenous thing, scarfing down thick mouthfuls of it.

Jack’s eyes widened at the display, and when the red-head glared back at him, he politely looked away, sinking his teeth into the crust of his own meal. “It is good...nice not to have to pick out any bugs.” He mused.

His companion ignored him and Jack glanced back towards his hand, at the large jade dragon ring that adorned it. But, that wasn’t the starving man’s only accoutrement. He wore another ring as well, this one gold and ruby, with the crest of a lion, though it looked dirt caked and mildly tarnished, which was probably why their pick-pocket hadn’t noticed it first.

“A lion and a dragon,” Jack mused. “Now there’s a winning pair right there. Sends the right message certainly; stand in my way and you’ll be eaten.”

Only now did the other man glance up, brushing the crumbs from his own scruffy facial hair. “Is that what it says to you, little sparrow?” there was almost a smile in the corner of his lips as he spoke, and indeed it grew instantly when Jack’s cheeks went red.

“*Little?!!*” he gawked.

Hector chuckled softly, “Apologizes. I meant no offense.”

Jack huffed and shoved another chunk of bread into his mouth. “I may not bear the crest of a pirate lord, but that doesn’t mean I’m not a threat. Little indeed...” he muttered, and Hector smiled more behind his mouthful of bread.

“And how is it ye be knowing about the pirate lords and their marks, might I ask?”

“Ah well, I’ve known a few in my time.” Jack answered smoothly. “Been all over the world, I have, from the shores of the Americas to the mysteries of the China Sea.”

“That so?”

“You callin’ me a liar?”

“Are you?”

“Of course, but that’s no reason to assume what I’m telling you right now is a lie.”

Hector rolled his eyes, shoving the last few bites of his meal into his mouth and swallowing hard. His stomach ached with the sudden fullness, but he didn’t care. This pain was easier to bear than the other.

“Have it your way,” he replied, studying the other sailor carefully.

“So, how is it you came by that ring?” Jack asked, looking at the large jade jewel with wide, fascinated eyes. Reflexively the other man closed his hand over it, pull them close to his chest.

“It...was a gift.” He mumbled. Saying just that much made Hector’s heart twinge and made his eyes sting. Damn him for a soft fool, still shedding tears over the callous prick that left him to rot in this place. His sadness turned at once to anger and he grit his teeth, yanking the item from his hand and hurling it away, watching it clatter across the stones for a moment, then got to his feet, much to his and Jack’s surprise.

“It was kind of ya to help me, Sparrow, but I’m afraid you wasted yer time. I’ll be on my way, as I’m sure you must as well.”

He started off towards the street, though his steps were slow and calculated for fear that he might fall again. Jack watched him go, and only when he turned the corner did he get up and go to the place where the ring had fallen. He picked it up, turning it over in his hand. It truly was a pretty thing and for a moment he considered pocketing it and moving on. Yet a little voice at the back of his mind nagged at him. It wasn’t just the ring that had caught his eye; for its owner was just as fascinating.

And Jack, curious magpie he was, wanted to know more.

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He followed Hector throughout the port, always staying out of sight and keeping a safe enough distance that the gangly redhead might not notice him right away. He watched as the other man drifted about, speaking to sailors as he passed—but only those that looked like they might have a higher rank among the ship’s crew. By and by, Jack realized the man was trying to barter

passage aboard a ship, but he was continually turned away.

*“PLEASE!”*

Hector barked in desperation, gripping the table in front of the man he was speaking to, who sat there with quill and paper, looking like he’d love nothing better than to be rid of the man in front of him. “All I’m asking is for a chance to work! I have skill aboard a ship, I have sailed from Singapore to this godforsaken piss piece of rock, I know how to chart course, read maps, whatever you may need! I’m fluent in three languages, including Mandarin and Malay! I can *help* you! I’m more qualified to work this ship than most of the pigs you’ve taken aboard!”

“That may be all well and good lad,” the man, the ship’s quarter master from Jack’s guess replied. He was short and round in the belly, with dark hair and thick sideburns that did little to distinguish his features. He was sunburned and well dressed for his position, and he looked down his nose at Hector’s mud-spattered and unkempt appearance. “But, as I told ye before, I can’t use you.”

“Why the hell not!?” He slammed his fist down on the table, causing the ink well to spill and the quarter master to look that much more annoyed with him.

“On account of yer scars, son.” The man answered, rather crudely. “That one below yer eye there tells me you have a taste for getting yourself into trouble, and that tongue of yours is more proof. Besides, what is it you’re after in Nassau?”

“That’s my business.”

“Indeed. There’s a bloody war going on over there, pirates having fighting to take the island from the East India Trading Company, and it’s getting more bloody all the time. Spies on both sides selling out their Captains for a piece of silver or the promise of land...” he pulled a gun from under the table and cocked it lazily at Hector. “I may not be an honest sailor, my boy, but neither am I a fool. You’re not going anywhere near my ship.”

Hector swore at him again, but finally turned away, starting off down the street again. Now Jack’s interest was really peaked. What was it that the curious man was seeking in Nassau? As the quartermaster had said the port was an utter mess at the moment, and even his own father, Captain Teague would not venture into those tumultuous waters for the time being. Too many of their kind had been captured and hung by the English there, and even more were suffering at the hands of their own ilk as greed and internal politics threatened to put an end to what had been known as the Brethren Coast.

But as Jack pondered all this, he realized he had nearly lost sight of his mark and hurried to catch up with him, not daring to give up the chase. The stranger was the most interesting thing Jack had encountered since they’d arrived, and that was saying something as Jack loved Tortuga like a second home.

He followed the man’s shock of feathery red hair through the crowds, as Hector weaved in and out of the narrow, labyrinth like streets of the port town. Jack nearly lost him completely once or twice, but was always able to spot him again, even if it meant scrambling on top of walls to get a better view, or hoping on the back of a passing cart to speed himself a long.

But then, quite abruptly, he lost the man all together.

Jack stood blinking in the middle of the road, head whipping about from left to right, trying to figure how he had lost the man who had been in sights not but a moment before. It was if



he had simply evaporated into thin air. For a moment, the young pirate felt a pang of defeat and fumbled with the discarded ring in his pocket. It seemed like his luck had run out. He fumbled through the folds of the sash that was tied around his waist, held in place by his belt, and from there lifted what appeared to be an antique compass. He studied it for a moment, and then began to turn away then, when a pair of hands reached out and yanked him from the road, dragging him through a darkened doorway.

Jack attempted to scream for help, only to be tossed hard onto the floor, a pair of swords thrust towards him.

“Don’t move!” a voice commanded above him in English, though it was heavily accented with distinct Chinese.

“My friends,” Jack chuckled nervously, “I thought we talked about this before, I didn’t mean any *harm*! It was such a pretty vase is all, and I had no idea it belonged to Emperor...so and so.” He grinned sheepishly, hoping to appear harmless and disarming.

It didn’t work.

He was grabbed by the back of his shirt and dragged up to his feet, his hands yanked behind his back and bound with a thick length of rope that cut into his skin. “Listen mates, I know we got off on the wrong foot, but if your Captain would just talk to my Captain I’m sure we could clear all this up! There’s no sense in blood shed—“ he was punched hard in the mouth and then again in the stomach, effectively silencing him for the moment.

The men above him spoke in quick, harsh tones and Jack tried to piece together what they were saying from his own limited knowledge of the language, but it was lost on him. But, he needn’t have been fluent to understand what having a noose tied around his neck meant.

“Please! Gents! Let’s not be hasty! Parlay!” he crowed, though he was still choking from the earlier blow. “Oh damn you, don’t you understand what I’m saying to you!? Parlay! *Parlay!!*”

“Ting zhi!”\* another voice commanded suddenly, causing all three men to look up in surprise. “Fàng kāi tā!”\*

Jack’s watering eyes widened and he smiled with relief when he saw that standing in the doorway, sword in hand, was none other than the stranger he’d rescued before.

The men who had bound him, a pair of smugglers that Jack had encountered the evening before, blinked at the newcomer in speechless surprise for a moment. It seemed to dumbfound them that the words coming from the man’s mouth were of their own tongue; as it was more than rare for a westerner to speak their language, much less with any fluency.

They turned and spoke quickly to each other in surprised tones, until Hector barked something else at them again, and they once more turned to him, the largest of the pair stepping forward with his sword at hand.

“Who do you think you are?” the pirate muttered gruffly and Jack shouted behind him.

“Ha! I knew you understood me! You--!” he was given another smack in the mouth for his trouble before having a knotted rag shoved between his teeth to gag him.

“Belay that!” the interloper snapped to the other sailor, looking at him harshly. “Let the

'im go, he's a fool sure enough, but we both know that killing him will bring you no honor and if you're caught your Captain will be the one who suffers for your miserable treachery."

"And what do you know of our Captain?" the larger pirate, who was broad and wide and nearly three inches taller than Hector himself, sporting many intricate tattoos across his large chest and belly.

"I know he's struck an accord with several English merchant vessels, and bought you and your crew safe passage past the navy's blockade outside Cuba. A piece of information I might be obliged to divulge to the pirates crawling this port, who would be very interested to know they had a navy spy among them."

"He's lying."

"Am I? Test me if you're so sure. But if you kill that man you'll soon find you wish you had traded places with him when yer Captain keelhauls ye."

The two sailors looked at each other nervously and began to argue again in their native tongue, but Hector just rolled his eyes, reached into his belt, pulled out his pistol and shot the rope from the smaller man's hand, taking one of his fingers with it.

The man screamed as blood spurted from the wound, and the distraction allowed Jack enough room to wiggle free from the noose around his neck and roll to the side as Hector's blade clashed with the tattooed sailor's.

The larger man bore down on him with rage, but Hector, for all his early weakness, showed surprising vigor and skill with a sword, successfully parrying every thrust and deftly avoiding having his head removed from his shoulders.

From the sidelines, Jack watched all this in growing awe, for this was a display of sword technique he was not familiar with, and even the way that Hector moved during the duel spoke of a man who had been trained in combat arts far from the teachings of the average Englishman. He soon managed to wriggle himself free from the knots that bound his hand, and spit the gag from his mouth, grabbing his own sword and joined the fray.

Now with two swords set against him, the Chinese sailor looked simultaneously enraged and dubious. But surrender seemed to be far from his mind. His companion, having taken up his own sword in his bloody hand, charged forward, but Jack dispatched him quickly, tripping the man and sending him crashing into the wall of the empty shop and overturning a rather large, heavy shelf upon himself.

"Where did you learn to fight?" Jack called excitedly next to Hector, as he dodged another swing of the man's long thin sword that was aimed at his chest.

"What?!"

"Where did you learn to fight?!" Jack called again. "You're wonderful! I mean, your posture is a bit off, but otherwise—"

"I don't think that now is the time for this!" the red head barked back, their enemy turning to bare down on him hard, driving him back against the wall, forcing Hector to flatten himself there and lift his legs, using them to kick out and strike the hulking pirate hard in gut, propelling him backward.

As he stumbled to right himself, Jack swung behind him, slashing him across the back of

the knees and sending the man to the floor, flat on his back. The floorboards beneath him cracked audibly, raising a cloud of dust into the air.

In the aftermath Hector reached over and grabbed Jack by the wrist and tugged the man out the door, darting hurriedly down the street before their work could be discovered.

“Where are we going?” Jack gasped.

“Away from here, ya git! I’m not about to be caught by the rest of their crewmen. I doubt the rest of them are such drunken fools as to believe that little fairy tale I just made up.”

The tan skinned pirate dug his heels in, causing Hector to give pause, turning towards him. Looking back, he saw that Jack’s eyes were wide and sparkling with mirth. “You mean you made that bit about their captain being a double-dealing yeasty codpiece?”

He shrugged, “Well, yes.”

Sparrow erupted with laughter, holding his sides. He laughed so loud that Hector clapped a hand over his mouth and pulled him into the shade of a doorway to avoid drawing further attention to themselves.

“You’re quite clever, aren’t you mate?”

“It’s not exactly cleverness to assume that anyone in this port has something to hide.”

“Aye, but you have a point.” He tapped his finger to his head and then reached into his vest pocket and fished out Hector’s discarded ring. The blue-eyed man looked at it in surprise for a second and then snatched it back, his pale cheeks slightly pinker.

“Thank yee.”

“It must mean something to you. And even if it didn’t, like the bugger said, jade is hard to come by.” He dusted himself off and leaned lazily back against the stone arch, “What do you call yourself, my friend?”

His companion was silent for a moment, seeming to ponder whether or not to answer, and then replied; “My given name is Hector. Barbossa is what they call me here.”

“Ah,” Jack nodded, “On account of the hair I presume, and that sad bit of scruff you call a beard.”

Barbossa’s blue eyes flashed with indignity and his cheeks went pink again, and Jack could not help but continue to smile as a result. Something about the man’s indignant reactions to his brazenness trickled him.

“Alright, *Jack Sparrow*. Now that we’ve been formally introduced, why don’t you explain to me why it was you decided to follow me?”

Jack rolled his shoulders sheepishly, “Oh well...suppose it was just my kind hearted nature that compelled me to make sure you were well after your little fainting spell back there. Glad to see you’re fairly recovered.”

“Ah. How charitable of ye.” Hector muttered, eyeing the man with a cool gaze. “Now what’s the real reason?”

“As it so happens, I was looking for someone who could help me with a little problem of mine. Someone with special talents, as it were.”

“What sort of special talents?”

Jack looked around nervously, chewing his thumb nail as he scanned the crowd, then leaned closer to Hector, so much so that he was pressed against the other man’s chest. “Not here,” he whispered. “The walls have eyes.”

Barbossa raised an eyebrow and started to protest, but Jack had his wrist again and started pulling him along down the street, keeping stride behind a wagon that was carrying large barrels of rum.

“Where are you taking me?” Barbossa muttered, trying to shake free from the grip, but Jack didn’t seem to notice.

“Someplace where we won’t be overheard.”

“Don’t imagine such a place exists here.”

“Ye of little faith,” the smaller man smirked.

They followed the road for a mile or so until they came to an Inn that was perched on the craggy cliff overlooking the harbor below called “Siren’s Cove”. It was weathered and dilapidated from so many seasons of harsh winds and heavy sea spray, and it creaked and groaned in the breeze. Behind the Inn itself was a narrow, rocky stairway that wound and twisted its way down to the beach below, and here the pair could see several small camps and bond fires built.

The two young men entered the Inn through the heavy, warped front door, stepping out of the boiling sun into the dark shade of the drinking hall, which was clustered with tables filled with pirates in similar need of refuge. This time of day it was quieter, patrons quietly conducting their dealings while swilling gin and rum, and others seeking solitude until other businesses opened in the evening.

Jack did not give Hector much time to take stock of the place, instead tugging him insistently towards the back of the room to a table that was nearly shoved underneath the stairwell that lead to the rooms above. “I’ll buy us a round,” he explained, “and something to eat. Stay here, and don’t look at anyone.”

Hector rolled his eyes and scoffed quietly as Sparrow made hastily for the bar, though he was perfectly happy to comply with the advice. He eyed his new companion from the corner, noticing for the first time that the man was bare foot and nearly as ragged looking as he was, which could only mean that Jack was in a similar position of destitution or that he had just come to port after a long voyage. But in all his weeks drifting around this forsaken rock, Hector had never laid eyes on him before, so he must have been a fresh arrival.

He looked down at the rings on his hand, trying to figure out what the significance of all this was when Jack returned with two heavy pints of rum gripped in one hand, a large tray of bread, cheese and salted pork in the other.

The redhaired man heard his stomach rumble audibly at the sight and Jack nudged the plate towards him, “You eat, I’ll talk.”

Hector smirked at him, digging into the food with little reserve. “Somehow I think you begin a lot of conversations this way.”

Jack smiled but ignored him, and after giving the room another quick scan with his eyes, leaned in close to Barbossa to speak; “As it so happens, those gents you helped me dispatch back there were part of a larger difficulty I’ve been having lately. I know you were only joking about their Captain being a spy...but you may be closer to the truth than you thought.”

The other man raised an eyebrow as he drank from his tankard but said nothing. Accusing a man of spying for the crown was serious charge among pirates. It was not something that was spoken of lightly, even if friendly company.

“My Captain came into port late last evening, and he’s been worried that one of our fellow pirates have been feeding information to the English about ports such as these. He can’t prove anything yet, but I suspect as you said, it’s one of the other Captain’s who’s the rat.”

Barbossa considered this carefully as he ate, feeling the rum hit him a bit harder than expected after weeks of malnutrition. “And how does this involve me, as it were?”

“You said yourself you speak several languages. And people are often more inclined to freely discuss delicate details when they think they won’t be overheard by unfriendly ears.” Jack suggested.

The man across from him narrowed his blue eyes, then shrugged. “I don’t think it be the Chinese that have double crossed you. While you might have a few greedy enough to try, they don’t suffer the English more than they have to, and the Navy is twice as condescending towards their abilities as any of our ilk.” He replied.

Jack considered this carefully, nursing his own drink and having ignored the food for the most part. “Alright then, I suppose you have a point. But it doesn’t change that there’s a spy among us. How do I flush ‘im out?”

Hector smiled again in that smug manner and Jack found that it sent a thrill of annoyance through him each time. “And what is it ye have to offer me for puttin’ myself on the line in this little endeavor of yours?”

“A place on my ship.” Jack answered.

Hector choked down a bite of bread and had to clap a hand to his chest to get it down. “*Your ship?*” he sputtered.

“Aye. *My ship.* We’re bound for St. Martin once we leave here. The pay is good, and there’s bound to be an adventure or two in it for you. I might even be able to convince the Captain to make passage to Nassau...if you play your cards right.” He gave Barbossa his own devilish smile in return, leaning back in his chair, kicking his feet up on the table and draining the rest of his tankard in two easy gulps.

The pale copper haired man mused on this for awhile, but Jack knew he had him. The deal was too good to pass up, especially for someone like Hector, who hadn’t much to lose.

Finally, Hector held out his hand. “Aye, we have an accord.”

Jack sat up excitedly and grabbed his palm in his, only to be stunned when the taller man yanked him forward across the table, bringing him nearly nose to nose with him. “But mark my words, whelp. If this be some trickery of yours, I’ll make you sorry for it. Am I clear?”

The dark-haired pirate nodded, staring back into Hector’s pale blue eyes with a surety that was mystifying. “Clear as crystal mate, never fear.”

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## Chapter 2

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Hector was drowsy with drink and a full belly, listening in contented silence as his new-found benefactor droned on and on about his grand adventures on the seas, obviously eager to impress. All his chirping and crowing about himself made Hector chuckle and roll his eyes, taking it all in stride. Jack was a braggart, but he was harmless and seemed well-meaning enough.

Outside the sun had vanished behind heavy dark storm clouds that had rolled over the harbor like thick smoke, and now low rolls of thunder could be heard approaching. Glancing out the windows that overlooked the high cliff upon which the Inn was perched revealed a churning, green-grey sea with heavy foam and forked rods of lightning in the far distance, reaching down like the finger of the gods to strike at the ocean.

With the approaching storm, the Inn began to fill even further, until it was packed with warm bodies seeking refuge from the wind and rain. A tall man, wearing a large feathered hat and a long, luxurious red coat appeared among the throng. His hair was a mane of long black braids, twisted with cord and colorful threads, and his features were long and lined, with large sunken brown eyes. The heavy jewels he wore—his fingers laden with rings and his neck adorned with a heavy gold chain with several medallions, spoke of pirate royalty and status.

He nudged Jack with his foot under the table and the other man looked up from his second tankard of rum. “Who do you suppose that is?” Hector asked, leaning in as he nodded towards the well-dressed stranger. “From the looks of ‘im, I’d swear he was one of the—“

“Pirate Lords?” Jack asked casually. “Aye, and not *just* a lord, but keeper of the Code itself.”

He raised an eyebrow at the youth, “How do ye know that?”

Jack shrugged, seeming far less impressed than Hector was. “The old blighter is my Captain.” He answered with a bit of a sigh. “And a hard one he is, so mind you don’t cross ‘im.”

His companion nodded appreciatively. He felt a little thrill in his belly at the idea of once more setting sail with a Pirate Lord. He remembered Sao Jong, Sao Feng’s father, who had also been one. Jong was a cold and distant man, obsessive in his pursuits and selfish to his core. Tragedy had made him that way, Hector knew, and though he respected the man he could find little sympathy for his actions.

He withdrew from his memories again before they could take hold and looked back at Jack. “So yer Captain believes that someone among the pirates here is less than honoring of the Code, that it?”

The black-haired man nodded, “Aye. We were nearly over taken by a naval vessel on the way here, one that knew what we were before our colors were even struck. They attacked without warning, as though they knew we were coming.”

Hector could see by the dark, troubled look that passed over the garish young man’s sharp features that it had been a harrowing experience for him. “We took heavy fire, but only few injuries.”

“Fortunate.”

“Not fortunate enough,” Jack muttered. “I’ve reason to believe that the bastards aren’t through with us. We managed to lose them in the shallows around one of the outlying islands, but I’ve got a nasty feeling in my gut they’re waiting for us.”

“Wait them out,” Hector answered thoughtfully. “Surely yer Captian wouldn’t object to weighing anchor here for a time until they lose interest. The royal navy has an agenda to keep, they won’t be keen to waste there resources stalking one pirate ship, not when hundreds more are out there.”

Jack gave him a vaguely suspicious glance. “Naval man yourself, were you?” he asked.

Hector soured, “Ne’re. But I’ve had...encounters with their ilk.”

“Alright,” his companion nodded, seeming satisfied with the answer for now. The room was becoming increasingly more overcrowded, and the din of drunken voices was steadily drowning out the approaching thunder, though the sound of the pounding rain on the old roof could still be heard beneath the uproar.

As the pair glanced around they could see several eyes watching them from various spots among the tavern, and often the gazes were of the unfriendly type. Hector tensed, mentally preparing himself for another brawl, until he felt Jack’s hand on his shoulder.

Startled, he looked up and the younger man nodded for him to follow. Stealing a last mouthful of stale bread the man stood and followed him through the throng of pirates to the stairs that lead to the lodging rooms upstairs. Passing the dirty windows that dotted the stone walls they could see large waves crashing down hard upon the beach below, it’s previous occupants having retreated for high ground long before. A blinding flash of lightning illuminated the entire Inn for a second and the accompanying thunder shook the floorboards below their feet and made the chandeliers that hung from the ceiling sway on their chains, candles flickering in the draft.

Jack produced a small iron key from one of his pockets, undoing the lock of a room at the far east end of the hall. Inside the small room, which had a slanted ceiling and one small window, were two narrow beds, a stool and table.

Sparrow took the candle sticks from the table and lit them to give the tiny room some light. Once this was accomplished, he moved immediately to one of the bed and sat down upon the edge, pulling his stiff shirt over his head and tossing it over the foot of the wooden rail with a yawn. He stretched his arms high above his head and arched and twisted his back, and in doing so, Hector saw for the first time that his bronze colored skin was marked with heavy tattoos in intricate circles and what appeared to be words.

Jack looked back at him sleepily, then blinked as he realized that Hector hadn’t moved from his spot in the doorway.

“What’s the matter? Afraid I’ll bite?” he chuckled, finding the man’s constant apprehension bordering on the humorously ludicrous.

Hector didn’t laugh or smile, but shifted from one foot to the other warily, glancing back behind him out into the hallway.

“This be...mighty generous of ye. But I haven’t a way to pay ye for the room.”

“Pffft,” Jack sputtered, waving off the idea. “Yer part of the crew now, and we’re all



staying here for the night, that's payment enough. That is, unless you have somewhere better to be, eh?"

He knew the answer was otherwise, but felt sorry for his little jab, seeing the vaguely wounded pride in the man's blue eyes. Hector really did have the bluest eyes Jack had ever seen, the color of the sea near the Caribbean shore. Look too long and you might get lost in them.

"Come in, make yourself at home."

"Heh." he scoffed, finally shuffling inside and moving towards the stool and table at the opposite end of the small space. "So tell me," he began at length, "how is it you came to serve on a Pirate Lord's ship. S'no easy task, I imagine."

"Well, I suppose it's just my winning personality." Jack replied with another charming smile, now sprawled on his back in the sheets, looking content and drowsy.

"Hnh. I suppose." He smiled, only because he knew Jack wasn't looking.

"And you? How is it a poor Englishmen comes to learn so many tongues at such a young age. Ye can't be much older than I am...yer parent's much have been the intellectual type. Noblemen maybe? That why you're here? Bit of a black sheep eh?"

Barbossa didn't answer, he was staring out the window at the storm. Jack didn't think much of the silence, but peeked over at him under the fringe of his eyelashes. "Right. Enough idle prattle. What say we call it a night. Tomorrow I'll introduce you to the Captain."

"Aye."

Jack rolled over, and much to Hector's surprise, seemed to be fall asleep within seconds for his breathing grew heavy, punctuated by the occasional soft snore or vague mutter. Only once he was sure that his companion was completely sleep did he feel an unconscious tension in his shoulders release. It vexed him vaguely that he was this guarded, but it was a hard lesson learned.

The wind and rain rattled the window pain and here and there little drips of water rushed down the slated boards and beams of the ceiling to splatter on the warped floorboards. The draft was considerable and after a time he shivered and made his way over to the other bed, pulling the musty blanket from the mat and giving it a thorough shake before wrapping it around his shoulders. He did not lie upon the bed though, despite the way he ached and longed for something soft to rest on. Downstairs the boisterous noise of the other pirates reminded him that he was in dubious company, and locked doors could be easily picked or broken. He took the stool and dragged it behind the door and made himself as comfortable as possible against the wall. He watched Jack for a long time, eyes drinking in the strange lines of his tattoos, slowly deciphering the letters and symbols, realizing they were instructions of some kind. How odd. It was as if someone had used the man's flesh like it was some sacred tome.

His eyes drooped and the drink and exhaustion settled into him at last, and he dropped off into a fitting sleep.

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Muffled voices woke him hours later, whispers not meant for his ears. Barbossa blinked

past the lingering fog of sleep and frowned, trying to discern dream from reality as he pressed his ear to the wall.

There were at least three voices on the other side, muttering and whispering in turn, seeming to argue with one another, though he could not make out exactly what it was they were speaking of. He sat up stiffly, thinking perhaps it was just more drunk patrons trying to find their room. But then the lock upon the door began to giggle, and he saw what looked like a pin or needle being forced through the hole, attempting to undo the lock.

Without further contemplation, Hector shrugged off the blanket and stood, flattening himself to the wall, reaching into his belt to retrieve his flintlock and waited. His eyes darted towards Jack in the dark, but the other man hadn't been disturbed and was still sleeping heavily.

"...hurry it up would you?" a voice on the other side hissed. "—any longer and we'll be noticed!"

"Shut yer trap, it can't be rushed! Besides he'll hear you," another voice, lighter and sharper hissed back.

"Morris, you keep watch. This needs to be done quick and quiet, no witnesses."

Barbossa's eyes narrowed, knowing this meant nothing good. The lock turned over and the door came open just a sliver. He held his breath, pressing himself as flat against the wall as possible, concealed in the shadows, and waited.

Long, dirty fingers curled around the edge of the door and pushed it open with a soft creak. A figure stepped into the room, and he could just barely make out a head of dirty blonde curls beneath a headscarf. The man wore a long tattered coat, and heavy boots which made the boards below his feet creak and groan. In the faint light coming from the window, Hector saw the glint of a long knife blade in the man's hand.

For a moment, no one moved. The intruder seemed to be testing his surroundings or struggling to see in the darkness. But soon his attention came to the man still sleeping on the bed and he moved forward again with purpose.

Barbossa had a split second to think. Clearly this intruder meant to murder whomever he believed was in that bed. He could flee now, fight his way past the other two fiends in the hall and save his own skin, leaving Sparrow to fend for himself. Or, he could intervene and very well die in the process.

The would be murderer moved to the side of Jack's bed, knife raised high, but before he could bring it down, there was the sudden, deafening crack of and spark of a gun being fired. The bullet pierced the man's arm and caused him to drop his weapon to the floor with a shout of agony. A bare foot shot up from the bed then and caught him brutally in the throat, sending him flat to the floor with a gurgled cry.

A body moved behind Hector and an arm was around his neck, drawing him back harshly as it choked him. He grappled with the new attacker, trying to break the hold that was steadily suffocating him. He threw his elbow back into the man's guts, driving the sharp bone deep into the soft flesh and earning a hefty grunt of pain in return. When the hold on his neck still did not break he bent as far over as he could and flipped the man over his back. Hector twisted in the choke hold, almost free, but ended up on the floor himself.

Now the third man, the look out, came bursting into the room. He had two guns in each

hand and fired off a round as soon as he entered the doorway. The shots missed their marks by a narrow margin and Hector struggled for his sword, only to be flattened to the ground with a hand smothered across his mouth and nose.

There was a blur of movement in the dark and a nimble body leapt over his, attacking the gunmen with a flash of steel and an excited cry. Jack slashed at the man, raking him across the chest and shoulder with his blade and making him fall back with a cry.

With this man dispatched, Jack whirled on heel and kicked out his leg again, striking Barbossa's attacker in the head with the heel of his foot. The blow forced him to release the smothering hold he had on the other pirate, who gasped for breath before rolling over and stabbing the man through middle with his sword.

Jack's hands came up under his arms, pulling him to his feet and allowing him to rest against his shoulder for a moment. "Good show mate, you alright?"

Barbossa nodded, still catching his breath. Together they stepped over the dead body to the man lying on the floor by the bed, still nursing his wounded arm and cursing. Both pirates pointed their blades to his throat.

"Better start explaining yourself De'lay." Jack spat.

Hector's eyes darted towards him. "You know this rotten sod?"

"Aye." Jack muttered and kicked the man in the gut, earning a sharp yelp from him. "And the rest of the lot as well. You traitorous pack of jackals...thought yourselves right clever I suppose? Tryin' to murder me in my sleep." He spat on him. "You'd better pray I kill you before Teague does."

"Please! Have mercy Jackie, it weren't my idea!"

"That so?" Jack muttered, unconvinced. "Yet here you are."

"I hadn't a choice...it's old Makus what wants yer blood."

"Makus? That old bastard," Jack seemed perplexed by this idea for a moment but then shook his head. "If that be the case, then I must conclude that he's the one who's been feeding information to the Navy. He's a traitor and a liar and you're a fool to follow him, savvy?"

"It wasn't personal, Jackie. I've nothing against ye..."

Hector kicked him in the face and he went down and was silent. Jack looked at him in surprise in the dark and the redhaired pirate rolled his shoulders, brushing his hair from his eyes. "Stabbin's mighty personal if you ask me."

"Agreed."

They looked around at the heap of bodies lying at their feet. "What do we do now?"

Jack grabbed his shirt from the bed and pulled it hastily over his head. "We see the Captain and warn him before Makus finds out his little plot failed. If he's after me chances are he'll be after Teague next."

"To what purpose?"

“Smells like mutiny to me.” Jack muttered, brow furrowed and a low boiling rage inside him. Hector nodded mutely and followed as they made their way hastily from the room out into the darkened room in search of the Captain’s quarters. It was not difficult to find, however, as Jack seemed to know exactly where the man was lodging. The room was on the top most floor, one story above where they had been lodging themselves, and the sounds coming from behind the door told both men that the Captain was doing anything but sleeping.

Hector hesitated, but Jack knocked the door open and strode inside, caring not for the startled screams that came from the pair of young women that were cuddled on the bed with the same pirate that Hector had spotted earlier in the tavern.

As the women scrambled to cover themselves, Jack marched towards the bed. “Captain! It’s Makus, he—“

His shirt was snatched by the older man’s jeweled fingers and yanked viciously forward before being cuffed harshly for his trouble. “What have I *told* you, boy?” the man upon the bed snarled as Jack laid on the blanket, rubbing his now bleeding face.

“Sir, apologizes, but—“

“You are *never* to interrupt me. I warned you before that your squabbles with the crew are your own—“

“De’lay just tried to murder me in my sleep! Does that not warrant said interruption!?” Jack hissed, clearly frustrated.

At this the Captain grew quiet. The women who occupied his bed wrapped themselves in sheets and blankets and gathered their things, slipping quietly passed Hector without a word. Teague sat forward, his dark braids dripping over his naked shoulders and down across the concave dip of his chest. Like Jack, he was heavily tattooed, but there seemed to be less purpose to his markings, or perhaps they were too faded with sun and age for Hector to see them clearly in the dim lantern light of the room.

The Captain eyed the young crewman before him for a moment before his dark gaze turned to Hector and sent a shiver down his spine. “And who’s this?” the man rattled in his raspy voice.

Jack turned towards Barbossa and ushered him to step inside and close the door, which the man did in silence. “This is Barbossa. Saved my life twice this day, not that it’s of importance to you. I promised him a place aboard the ship; he can be of use to us.”

Teague said nothing but continued to eye the pair of them with grim intensity, knitting his long, ringed fingers together. Slowly he raised one of his knotted digits and motioned Barbossa forward. Hector stepped closer, head high, shoulders squared. He knew he could not show any meekness in the face of man such as this, otherwise he would be immediately discarded.

The old Captain looked him up and down and Hector kept as still as possible, showing no emotion, despite feeling a distinct chill as though the old seaman’s eyes were peering through his flesh into his soul.

“State your business.” He spoke at last, softly and slowly, the sound shaking its way out of his throat.

“Sparrow paid me a kindness, sir and returned what had been stolen from me. I was only

repaying my debt to him.”

Teague nodded faintly and his eyes wandered to Hector’s hand and lingered there a moment. He resisted the urge to pull his hand behind his back, shielding his rings from view, knowing that Teague was staring at them. Slowly the man returned his gaze to Hector’s eyes, then looked back at Sparrow.

“Out, boy. I wish to speak to this one alone.”

“But sir!” Jack objected loudly, “Did I not just make it clear that one of our own crew tried to murder me just now!?”

The Captain frowned at him sourly, “Tobes!” he shouted.

From an adjoining doorway, a new figure appeared. He towered over the three of them, clearing Hector’s own considerable height by a full head. He had short, ragged blonde hair, his skin covered in various tattoos of all shapes and colors. Unlike Teague, he had a friendly face, and even in this obviously confusing moment at such a late hour, he seemed pleased to have been summoned. Or at least less perturbed than his Captain.

“Yes, what—“ he looked at the two young men who now occupied his Captain’s bed chamber instead of the two lusty young women who had been there before. The looks on each of their faces seemed to tell the whole story, and the muscular pirate folded his inked arms across his broad, bare chest and let out a rather hardy guffaw at it. “Oh for god’s sake, what have you gotten yourself into this time?” he said, leveling his gaze at Jack.

The ebony haired youth bristled like an angry cat. “ALMOST STABBED!” he spat.

“Remove the boy Tobes, see that he doesn’t get in any more trouble until I’ve finished words with this one.”

“Alright Jackie, up you come.”

The bigger man rounded the bed and took Jack by the scruff of the neck, much to his ire and chagrin and frog marched him from the room, closing the door behind them as Jack cursed and spat.

Alone in the room, Hector’s gaze returned to Teague, who had reclined in his pillows, gazing at him thoughtfully. “Your hand, boy. Show it to me.”

Barbossa tensed, defiant for a moment, but eventually relented and held out his ringed hand for the man to examine. His gnarled fingers closed around Barbossa’s wrist, pulling him closer to see the adornments.

“I know these rings. How came you by them?”

He tapped the ruby one bearing the lion’s head. “This one in particular interests me. This ring once belonged to a Spanish king and was stolen on his passage to France. It was taken, along with many other priceless items, by a particularly brash young sailor who called himself Calico Jack. So why is it you wear this treasure?”

“Captain Rackham is my father, sir.” Hector answered, his tone blunt. This was not something he wanted to discuss with the strange, twisted old man, nor anyone really. This wound

was fresh even after all these years and he couldn't bring himself to speak of it freely.

Teague seemed to consider this for a moment, looking at Barbossa with a closer eye now. "And I would venture to guess that it was Ann Bonny who mothered you."

Hector felt a lump in his throat and nodded silently.

"Pirate at yer conception. A hard sentence for one so young. Tell me, Barbossa, how is it you find yourself here? You are far from the shores your parents have made theirs through conquer and blood."

He didn't answer this time, he couldn't. It was too long and painful a tale and he felt he owed this man nothing of his personal pain. He withdrew his hand and Teague did not seem to resent the movement, simply observing him.

"My interference with your crewman's affairs is nothing but happenstance, Captain Teague."

"I might believe this if it had happened but once. Jack has an uncanny knack for finding trouble wherever it lies, and so it's no surprise to me that you might have stumbled across each other's path and, being honorable, you chose to repay your debt. This is happenstance. But Sparrow claims you have saved him twice in this same evening...that is deliberate."

Barbossa felt a heat rise in his cheeks and he looked at the floor, again not knowing how to answer the man he stood before.

"Sparrow offered me a place aboard your ship, sir. He warned me that some foul play was about, that you yourself expressed concern that you were being betrayed by one of your allies. I speak several languages, sir, I offered my services in helping him identify the traitor."

"I see." Teague answered. His hard features softened and he smiled faintly, creating more wrinkles on the deep lines of his face. "You bear the crest of the house of Sao Joing, Pirate Lord of Singapore, a man I have had many treacherous dealings with over the years."

Hector paled.

"How long did you serve this master?"

"I—"

"Do not lie, boy." He pulled from beneath his blankets a rather long pistol which he cocked and aimed squarely at Barbossa's chest.

"It was not Joing I served, sir. T'was his son, Sao Feng, under the tutelage of his uncle Sao Jing. I sailed under his flag until recently."

Teague did not lower the gun but nodded slowly. "And whom do you serve now?"

"No one." Hector said, a bit more sharply than he considered wise. "I am master of my own fate."

And to this Teague smiled, revealing gold teeth and a surprising warmth. "Ah." He lowered his weapon to the blankets again. "Well, young master, it is my flag you will sail under now. A reward for saving my son's skin."

Hector's eyes grew wide. "You're—" he whipped his head in direction of the door where Jack and the man named Tobes had vanished. Teague laughed softly behind him.

"Ah, failed to mention that part, did he?"

The redhead groaned quietly, covering his face with his palm, embarrassed by his own lack of observation. The bedclothes rustled and Barbossa felt the weight of the man's heavy palm on his shoulder. Teague had moved from the bed to dress himself, standing stark naked next to the awkward youth. "And since you've proved yourself so skilled at keeping the boy out of harm's way, he'll be in your charge. It will be a burden lifted from my already over taxed First Mate."

Hector whirled, eyes wide and mouth agape. "But--!"

Teague was already lacing up his breeches. "Unless of course, you'd rather return to scratching out an existence on the street until you starve."

Barbossa's face grew red, but he closed his lips tightly and Teague nodded. "I thought so."

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## Chapter 3

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In the wee hours of the night, Captain Teague, his First Mate, Jack and Barbossa made their way through the Inn, lead at the forefront by the Inn Keeper towards the ruined room where the bodies of Jack's would-be assailants remained.

Of the three attackers, only De'lay was still alive, groaning and twisting on the ground, having not yet fully recovered from the wounds he'd been dealt. Teague crossed the room and grabbed the man up from the floor and shook him.

"De'lay you treacherous dog, where is Makus? Don't lie to me either or you'll suffer further. You attempt to murder my kin—to what purpose I wonder?"

"Sir! Sir, Captain, sir! Have pity on me...Makus, he convinced us that you'd gone mad sir, and that the English would capture us any day and we'd all be in irons. He said a mutiny was our only chance to avoid the noose!"

"Doesn't explain why you attacked Jack," Tobes spat, voice gruff now with no sign of the friendliness he'd shown earlier.

"J-Jack...Makus said he suspected 'im. That he would warn you and you'd kill us all. Said Sparrow would trade us all to save his own skin..."

Jack looked livid, his honor impugned.

"And you believed him." Teague muttered, dropping him to the floor again where he groaned and sobbed.

"Please, sir, please forgive me! Let a man redeem himself to you!"

But Teague continued to glare at him, unmoved. It was then that the cowering pirate turned his sites on Jack and looked at him in desperation. "Jack! Jackie, my lad! You know your old friend Thomas, don't you? You know I would never bring you pain otherwise! You're like family to me!"

Beside them Tobes bristled, insulted by the plea. "Aye, if family means a bunch of back stabbing cut throats then you're practically blood." He muttered.

Jack's lips curled a bit and Barbossa could tell the lad was about to say something sarcastic on the matter, until De'lay flung himself at Jack's feet, gripping his leg and sobbing outright. "Please, Jackie! Please don't let 'im kill me!"

Sparrow squirmed, looking deeply uncomfortable with the display and tried to shake him off. "Thomas, you tried to stab me!"

"It would have been painless!"

"Well that's a relief..." Jack muttered.



“Get off!” Hector hissed, fed up with the blubbing display himself as he reached down and yanked the offender free from Sparrow’s leg, pointing his gun at him again as he had before. “Give the word and I’ll shut his trap. What say you, sir?”

“No, no, no, don’t kill the pathetic thing...” Jack sighed, pushing Hector’s gun to the floor, much to the surprise of everyone else. “I believe ‘im. You never were much for brains Thomas, still I thought better of you. But I think Barbossa has made you suffer enough for your stupidity. You can nurse that hole in your arm here until you rot for all I care.”

“Oh thankee Jack! Thankee! You’re too good for this old rat you are, too good sir!”

Teague looked rather displeased with this decision, glaring at his progeny with a skeptical gaze. “You grant mercy to this traitor, boy?”

Jack shrugged, “Well I certainly don’t feel like dragging another body to the coffin cart at this hour, do any of you? Besides, it’s always good to leave a man alive to tell the tale, eh? Doubt any other pirates will be willing to risk crossing us.”

This sounded like wisdom, though it was a bit muddled by Jack’s casual humor.

“Where is Makus, De’lay. Speak quickly.”

“On the ship sir, as you instructed.”

“Awaiting news of your mission, I’ve no doubt.”

“Aye sir.”

The Captain looked to his First Mate. “Let us go and give it to him then.”

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The storm had cooled the air to a bitter chill and caused thick banks of fog to roll in off the shore. As they walked the doc towards the massive pirate galleon, Hector’s pale eyes did all they good to drink up the details of it through the mist and dark.

Her broad sails shivered and waved in the night breeze, billowing above them like smoky grey clouds above the fog, and far above at the very top of the mast, her flag waved her colors triumphantly. She was a beauty to behold, tall and proud, the lanterns illuminating her ornate surfaces from bow to stern. A ship like this could indeed make itself master of the sea, and Barbossa felt a thrill of nervous anticipation ripple through his core as he made his way up the gang plank to the upper decks.

Jack, who walked ahead of him, held out a hand to usher him back as Teague and Tobes took the lead. With a plot like this in motion, it couldn’t be certain what trouble they would meet once they were on board again.

“Hang back, mate. Let’s give ‘em a nasty little surprise. I’m sure Makus is probably expecting my heart on silver platter. Instead his head is going to be on one.”

They waited until Teague and Tobes were fully aboard, then slipped onto the deck and

darted along the rail, Jack leading Barbossa into the Captain's cabin at once to be avoid being seen. From their hiding place, they heard Teague bellow for the remaining crew, who trotted onto the deck to head their Captain's call.

Hector watched the crew scramble to attention, about thirty in all, discounting those he was sure were still in port. Under the lantern light they could just make out their faces, though nothing particularly stood out among them. Men of all ages and origins, cobbled together to serve their shared desire for freedom and profit.

"I wonder how many more mutineers you have in your midst," Barbossa whispered to Jack as they huddled together in the crack of the door.

"Worried?" Jack teased.

"Not as much as *you* should be. The Captain's own son and you..." he sighed loudly and Jack turned to look him in the eye, standing closer than they realized as they were nearly nose to nose.

"Aye and what of it? I suppose that makes you think I had this coming then, eh? Spoiled brat and all."

His dark eyes were narrowed and intense, full of fire, clearly ready to challenge him. Jack may be arrogant, fool-hardy even, but he was not a soft simpering urchin clinging to his father's coat tails. Hector admired that and he smiled in spite of himself. "Makes ye a git is what it does, and a dead man if you're not *quiet!*" he hissed.

"My son is dead!" they heard Teague's voice bellow from across the deck. Jack looked up in surprise, blinking.

"I am?"

Hector slapped a hand over his mouth to silence him at last, straining to hear the Captain's words as he addressed the astonished crowd.

"He was murdered, not an hour ago...the pestilent culprit slipped into his room while he slept and slit his throat. I want answers—who among you know who could have done this!? Step forward!"

There was a hushed mutter of concern among the crew, but no one seemed eager to offer up anything useful. There came a stomping of heavy boot falls then and they saw the crowd part, allowing one man to step closer to Teague from the throng.

He was a short, thick man with a pot belly and a bristly grey beard and long hair, a patch over one eye. His arms were thick and muscular and looked as if they could lift one of the canons from its place as easily as if it were a feather pillow. "Captain, sir, my deepest regrets for the loss of our dear Jack," the man began. "But your boy will not go unavenged. Sir, I believe it was an enemy among us that killed the poor lad. One of the king's men, come into our port in disguise."

This sent a murmur through the crowd, but Teague looked at no one but the one-eyed man before him. This was Makus, Hector had no doubt now. The grand orchestrator of this ill-thought out mutiny.

"How funny you should suggest that one among us is a betrayer, Makus." Teague sneered, looking down his long, hooked nose at the man. "For I did not fail to notice how quick you are to place blame in an unnamed villain."

“Sir? I’m only trying to help.”

“Aye, help yourself to what’s mine.” Teague snarled. “Your henchmen were caught, Makus. You should have chosen your conspirators more carefully.”

The remainder of the crew grew hushed and took a further step backward, widening the gap between themselves and the other crewmen, who suddenly looked small in Teague’s shadow. Tobes stepped from his Captain’s side, moving closer to the pot belly man with hard look in his eye.

“Yer a fool, Makus and a disgrace. Ye covetous maggot. Ye thought killin Jack would save yer plot from being discovered? You know nothing of that boy...”

“I would never wish harm to young master Jack, Ol’ Tobes! Ne’re would I harm a hair on his head—“

“Ugh!” Jack erupted with a sound of disgust, pushing open the door and revealing himself to the huddled crew, who gawked in surprise. It was barely four in the morning but already the day was far more interesting than anticipated. “Any more of that and I’ll rightly be sick all over the deck.”

Teague lifted his head sharply at his son’s intrusion, and Tobes wilted silently.

Makus stared, bug eyed and blanched at the young man who sauntered towards him, looking both pleased and irritated at once.

“You.”

“Me?” Jack blinked. “Oh yes. *Me.*”

“You’re supposed to be *dead.*”

Jack shrugged off handedly, “Sorry to disappoint, mate. But, as the Captain said, you really should have thought this whole endeavor out more, eh? I mean really, what kind of mutiny are you running here?”

“That’s enough, boy.”

Sparrow glanced briefly towards his father, “Oh no. I’m not finished. *I*’m the one who was nearly sunk after all, not you. Well...I’m sure that was part of the plan *eventually*, but as I said—not well thought out.”

“Jack,” Tobes warned, shaking his head at the lad. He seemed to know that Sparrow was walking the fine line of his father’s patience.

“Listen you,” the black-haired sailor quipped, ignoring both men and turning sharply back to Makus, brandishing his sword and using the tip to poke him in his bulbous belly, making him yip. “You were an idiot to think you could ever convince this crew to betray the Keeper of the Code, just so that you could get an easy pay off from some cack-handed deck ape of the king’s navy. And a bigger idiot still, thinking that trying to convince our eastern friends to help you and talking about it in broad daylight just because you thought I was too stupid to understand...But your *biggest* mistake was not coming to finish me off yourself. Savvy?”

Makus leered at him, “You festering little cunt, I’ll have your—!” he reached for a knife in his pocket, and from the doorway Hector lurched forward, but he was too far away to do

anything.

But the knife hadn't even left the crewman's belt before a shot rang out among them, and the man toppled over in a heap, shot through the chest by Teague himself.

Jack looked down at the body, then turned blinking towards his captain again. "You can't let me have anything, can you?"

The older man cuffed him along the back of the head for his cheek and turned to address his crew once more. "Now, is there anyone else who'd like to follow Makus? Anyone else who thinks that I not be fit to Captain this vessel. Speak your piece now."

No one moved, no one so much as whispered.

Hector was in awe, it was a rare he'd ever seen a captain with such mastery over his men. This is what made a Pirate Lord he was certain, this is what both Sao Joing and his own father lacked.

"Aye. I thought not."

Tobes moved forward and grabbed Makus's body by the arms and dragged him to the edge of the rail before heaving him up and over into the water, where he dropped over with a hefty splash. "Shore leave is cut short, gentlemen. Get us underway Tobes. We sail at dawn."

"Aye-Aye Captain!"

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Two weeks out at a sea.

Life aboard a ship was every bit as thrilling and simultaneously difficult as Barbossa recalled. But the culture aboard The Misty Lady was vastly different than it had been on Sao's ship. For one, Hector was not First Mate.

Teague had relegated him to nothing more than a simple deck hand, and it was hard, relentless work. But no matter how much he ached from it, the salt air and the ever changing horizon lifted his spirits in a way he had almost forgotten. Hector had missed the sway of the deck beneath his feet, the endless blue of the sky and water meeting on a clear day, seeing mountains and beaches in the far distance, wondering about the people there and the little lives they were living. Wondering if somewhere among them were his parents; if he'd ever see Jack, Ann, or Mary ever again in this life.

But while being a crewman came as second nature to him, looking after Jack Sparrow was another task all together. The young pirate was unpredictable as the weather when it came to their relationship. He did seem to have a fondness for Barbossa—something Hector himself couldn't fully understand—but he gave him nothing short of hell whenever he attempted to curve of any of Jack's dangerous impulses. And woe, there were many.

This was *not* what he signed up for; to be a glorified nanny for impish captain's pet who couldn't be trusted not to get himself killed at any given moment. And it did seem like Jack enjoyed flirting with death and danger. They were practically in love. Someday it was all going to

come back to spite him and Hector could only shake his head at the thought. Fools would suffer, but perhaps not as much as those who were forced to witness their idiocy day in and day out.

And yet...sometimes when he looked at Jack it was like a completely different person was looking back at him. Somedays that impish smile was gone, replaced by long, thoughtful gazes and pensive silence. Perhaps rarer than this, there were days when Sparrow wouldn't speak to anyone and looked so small and lost...

Hector didn't know what to make of it. But it was days like this he would often find the lad looking at him longer, speaking less, and seeking him out even when he thought he was alone. It was days like this Hector wondered if for all of Jack's numerous companions aboard the ship, if he weren't actually very lonely...

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It had been a particularly scorching day at sea, and the wind had died, leaving the ship to drift upon the nearly still water. Such days could be a boon or a blessing for a crew, but this was certainly the latter, as the toiling crewmen boiled under the relentless heat of the sun. When night fell at long last, it was as if a sigh of relief washed over the ship and it's overheated and overtaxed crew.

Several men brought out instruments, fiddles and mandolins and fifes, and began to play along the deck for the other sailor's enjoyment, including Teague who was at the helm. Men danced and sang, passing around cups of grog and rum—happy. Whatever shadow had been over the ship prior to Hector's arrival seemed to have been dispelled with the failed mutiny, and now things were back to the old status quo.

Hector enjoyed watching the spectacle, but shied away from joining in the laughter, games and dancing. Instead he stayed at the rail, drinking alone and watching his ship mates revel against the backdrop of a dark pink setting sun that made the ocean turn the jewel like color of sapphire dusted with diamond. The stars were beginning to appear above them, and Hector could make out a few of the constellations in the darkening sky, and the moon was fading, a pale sliver low in the sky still.

His thoughts drifted, as they so often did these days, back to Sao Feng. He hated himself for thinking about the man in moments like this. He hated missing him. But he did, gods how he missed him. He hadn't always been cruel to Hector. He hadn't always been the terrifying image of his father before him, desperate for control.

He missed his laugh, and the shape of his eyes, the feel of his hands...

*"My Red Serpent..."* he could still hear Sao's voice cooing in his ear.

Hector felt a warm ache in his guts that spread down into his legs and he sighed. He was lonely too.

A hand was on his back then and he gasped, sloshing his drink over the edge of his tankard and turned in wide-eyed surprise to see Jack Sparrow standing next to him, looking back at him with amused smile on his lips. "Oy! Steady mate, didn't mean to startle you!" he chuckled, waving his hands in surrender.

Barbossa blinked at him a moment, then frowned. “Ye did no such thing. But I don’t like to be snuck up on either.” He muttered.

Jack nodded, “I see that. You were really far away just now weren’t you?”

“No,” he lied.

They looked out at the sunset together, watching it bleed slowly into the ocean, turning the sapphire color slowly to garnet and ruby. “Good to be back on the water?”

“Aye, more than you can imagine.”

Jack nodded, hoping up on the rail so that he could lean back against the lines, still looking between Barbossa and the sea. He liked the way the light played along the man’s face, the way the wind tussled his hair. “And how do you find life aboard The Misty Lady? To your liking?”

“She’s a fine ship.”

“Aye,” Sparrow nodded. “Someday, I’ll have one even grander. Faster, sleeker...this ship is built for plunder and to carry men great leagues across the water, but it makes her slow. Time stops...boredom sets in.”

“Restless spirit,” Hector mused. “Yer young, Sparrow. You’ll learn to appreciate stillness in your own time.”

Jack rolled his eyes, “You think I’m a ruddy child, I’m past twenty, I’ll have you know. Though...I’m not sure by how much...”

Hector chuckled softly. The other man certainly could make him laugh.

“Still have your heart set on Nassau?” Jack asked off handedly after a few moments, pretending that question was of purely curiosity and not an uncertainty that had been gnawing at him over the last few weeks.

The copper haired man nodded affirmatively, glancing over his shoulder towards the helm where Teague stood at the wheel, sharing a conversation with Ol’ Tobes, as he usually was. “I know there’s trouble with the Navy there, I’ve seen it myself. But I also know the kind of pirates that hold that port, and if there be a need to defend it, then I must go.”

“Why?” Jack chuckled. “What responsibility is it of yours what the Brethern Coast do? I don’t trust ‘em, personally. They try to live a little too close to the line between pirate and privateer, and there is where the water gets murky...people get betrayed, secrets are given up for the price of gold, and the world shrinks a little more around us. I don’t like it, mate. Not one bit.”

The other man sighed, “What do you know about the world?” He muttered.

Jack frowned. “More than you.”

Hector turned then and fixed him with a piercing gaze, “Boy, you know nothing of the world I’ve come from. You know *nothing* of what it’s like for the rest of us out there. Fortune favored you in its way, putting you here with the ties you have.” He looked again to Teague. “The rest of us must make our own luck, and our own way, and I mean to make mine.”

“Barbossa...”

“I’m going to ask him tonight. And if he says yes, when we put into port, that will be it.”

“What do you mean ‘it’?”

“I mean I intend to stay, to fight with them if need be.” His features softened slightly as he looked back at his shipmate; “I suppose you’ll have to find yourself another body guard.”

Jack squinted his features in irritation at the title, but shrugged it off. The idea that he *needed* Hector to protect him from anything was an absurd one. He’d gotten along just fine without the man before, and would do so again if he did decide to abandon ship and run off. But that wasn’t going to happen. Teague was adamant on avoiding Nassau if he could and staying out of their politics. If the pirates of the Brethern Coast thought they could govern themselves better than he could, then they could fix their own mess and tie their own nooses for all he cared.

They were quite again for a time and the sun had slipped down beneath the horizon and the sky was awash with stars. Jack thought the conversation dropped, and that like most nights, Hector would move on to something else, or slip off to his hammock to brood and sleep.

They both looked back at the Captain then and saw that Tobes had excused himself from his side. This wasn’t that interesting, until Hector suddenly moved from the rail. “I’m going.”

Barbossa didn’t see it but Jack’s expression changed, suddenly he looked worried. “Oh, I don’t think you want to be doing that, mate.”

“Why not?” the other man scoffed. “Never seen him in a more pleasant mood, I’d be a fool not to press my advantage.” He downed the rest of his drink and handed it to Jack. “Wish me luck.”

He turned and started off towards the deck, leaving Jack wide-eyed in his wake.

“Barbossa—“

But the other man ignored him, marching stalwartly towards their captain. Jack didn’t know what to do, feeling a sudden sharp sense of panic rising in his chest and crawling up his throat. What if Teague should change his mind? It was quite possible he was just that drunk...and then Hector would be gone.

What did it matter? Men came and went aboard the ship all the time, why did it matter?

Jack didn’t know, but it did. Right now it mattered more than breathing.

And with impulse overriding reason, Jack moved into action.

Barbossa had come to the foot of the short steps leading up to the helm, looking up at Teague. “Sir, permission to speak?”

Teague’s sad, deep set eyes slowly moved towards him and he nodded, “What is it Mr. Barbossa?”

“Sir, I know that we have a course set, but by my reckoning we’ll be passing the coast of Nassau on the east side in few days time.”

“Aye, what of it?”

“Sir, I know you recall our conversation in regard to Captains Rackham and Bonny; I should like to see if there is any service I could offer them. If you would release me, Captain.”

The man was eloquent as always, and Teague seemed to take his time mulling over the request. Hector’s fingers nervously gripped the rail, feeling his palms sweat his stomach pinch in anticipation. Oh if only the old blighter would just *answer* him!

Hurried footsteps came upon the opposite end of the deck, and Jack appeared there at his father’s elbow, laughing, swilling a fresh cup of rum. “I dunno, Captain. Seems a bit risky to me, chancing those waters just now. Could very well be a trap waiting there for us, as I’m sure the Navy knows to expect reinforcements, and our ship is known among them. They won’t be easy to fool.”

Hector gawked at him, hardly able to believe what he was hearing, while Jack looked on, pretending he didn’t feel the sting of Barbossa’s gaze, or feel the budding ache of guilt in his own heart.

“Fine then, we’ll be careful. Drop me off with a row boat from a safe distance—no risk to the ship.”

“Unless you’re captured of course.” Jack quipped.

The wood beneath Hector’s fingers gave a small, but ominous crack and he looked hard at Sparrow. “I can avoid capture, I assure you. I’m not a fool who goes looking for trouble.”

“Aren’t you though? Cause this feels just exactly that.”

Teague observed this debate in silence for a moment and then turned his gaze forward again. “I’m sorry, Barbossa. Jackie is right. Nassau is dangerous, and until I know more of the situation, I won’t risk it. In a few weeks time I am to meet with several other captains at Ship Wreck Cove. We are to discuss the business of Nassau then, and I will have an answer for you.”

Hector paled. “A few weeks? Sir, they may not have that.”

Teague was not moved by the concern in his tone. “When was it last you saw either of the Captains, my lad?”

“Years...four years it’s been sir. So you must understand my urgency. We are but days from that port, I can go ashore and give you word of the situation, I will—“

“I’m sorry, Hector. My answer is no.”

“No?” Hector muttered, temper rising, pale, freckled features growing red. “*No*, you say to me? You claimed to have known Calico Jack and Ann Bonny. Friends of yours were they? Because it certainly doesn’t seem so.”

Jack’s eyes were wide, but Teague’s were dark and narrowing. “Careful sir. You overstep yourself.”

“You’re a coward.”

Jack let out a silent gasp. He knew Hector had crossed a line. This had all gone so wrong. Teague moved from the wheel, another sailor quickly taking over, and approached Hector, who did not back down.



The older pirate reached and snatched the younger man forward by shirt and cuffed him hard across the face, knocking him to the foot of the stairs, where he crashed down hard. Jack cried out, moving to help him, but Teague bared his pass.

Barbossa looked up with angry tears in his eyes, teeth bared and blood running from his nose.

“Captain, wait! He didn’t mean it, he’s had too much drink! It’s my fault really, I—“

Teague shoved him back. “Quiet!”

The Captain turned back to his crewmen then, looking down at him coldly. “Apologize.”

Hector didn’t speak at first, breathing hard, trying to reign in his emotions that were bubbling over. He knew if he spoke out of turn again it could mean the brig and worse. He had to get control if he ever had a chance of changing Teague’s mind, much less maintaining his freedom aboard the ship.

“Sir...forgive me, sir. I spoke out of turn.”

“That you did.” Teague nodded.

Barbossa picked himself up slowly and stood, looking at his feet, shoulders slumped, defeated.

A thick hand came upon Hector’s shoulder, and he looked up to see Tobes standing there, looking at him with a stern frown, though his eyes were slightly sad. “What punishment do ye see fit, Captain?”

“Punishment?” Jack gawked, again moving forward, this time managing to slip past Teague, trying to put himself between Barbossa and Tobes. “Gentlemen, gentlemen! There’s no need for *punishment*! I mean, clearly the man’s already learned his lesson, look at ‘im! Sorry state he is, knows he was wrong I’m sure, won’t do it again, will you mate?”

He looked at Hector hopefully, but his gaze was not returned. Barbossa wouldn’t even look at him.

“I accept whatever punishment you decide, Captain.” He muttered instead.

Teague said nothing, but looked to his First Mate and gave a subtle nod.

Tobes reached for the lash he carried at his waist and Hector tensed like a spring, and Jack again tried to put himself between them.

“There’s no need for that—“

The larger man knocked him aside, took the collar of Barbossa’s shirt and yanked it down across his shoulders as the rest of the crew began to gather, wanting to watch. But Tobes stopped there, staring once he had pushed the younger man down upon his knees. Teague stepped closer now too, and no one moved.

The crew strained to see what had brought the imminent lashing to a sudden stand still. Indeed, it struck Jack as odd too, and he craned his neck to see and felt the wind knocked out of him.

Barbossa's back was marred with scars, long, wide welts that criss-crossed and overlapped each other in arches and crosses across his pale skin. He was no stranger to the lash. Markings like these could have only come from a severe flogging, one that should have left the man that bore them dead.

Hector said nothing, head down, breathing hard, hair obscuring his face.

"Hold," Teague said then quietly.

Tobes lowered the whip, grateful not to use it. He let go of Hector's shoulder and stepped back, turning instead to the crew, snarling at them to return to their duties. The Captain moved closer to the crewman's kneeling form. "I trust this be lesson enough."

"Aye sir." Came the shaky reply.

Teague reached down and grabbed Hector's hand then, pulling from it the ruby and bronze ring. Hector shouted in protest, but Teague ignored him, tucking the ring into his vest pocket. "A reminder of where your loyalties now lie, young Barbossa. Never fear, I will keep it safe. You'll have it again, when and if I see fit."

Jack's heart was in his throat, watching the display, but he remained silent.

Teague nodded and stepped away, this time vanishing into the cabin. Jack waited until he heard the door close completely and noted that Tobes had moved further down deck, snapping at the other crewmen to get them back on task before he moved towards Barbossa.

He reached for him, trying to help him up, for it was clear the shaking man was having a hard time of. But no sooner laid his hand upon his bare skin than Hector shoved him away with a snarl.

"Get yer hands off!" he spat.

"Hector, mate...I didn't mean—"

Barbossa struggled up and pulled his shirt back over his back and shoulders, face a cloud of bitterness and embarrassment. He refused to look at Jack, or anyone, his eyes were on the ground. He made his way to the lower deck, Sparrow at his heels.

"I was only tryin'--!"

Barbossa reached back, caught Jack by his shirt and flung him up against the deck wall, hard enough to make the smaller man yelp with surprise and pain. Staring back into Hector's eyes, all Jack could see was rage.

"I ain't yer friend Sparrow! And I don't need yer bloody *help* not now, not *ever*! I'm aboard this ship to keep you in line, and if that's what the Captain wants from me, that's what you'll get! From now on you address me as *sir* or Barbossa, nothin' else. And if you step out of line, I'm going to make sure you regret it. Understand?"

Jack shoved him off, feeling shaken himself, but he pushed the feeling away quickly, replacing it with smug indifference. "Sour grapes, mate. Some gratitude for getting you off that sorry rock. Maybe I should have left you where I found you."

"Maybe you should have." Hector muttered, leaving him there and disappearing into the dark. Only once he had gone did Jack sink down upon the steps with hefty sigh, head in his hands.

He was angry, yes, but mostly at himself.

“Oh Jack ye idiot...what did you go and do this time?”

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## Chapter 4

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Days went by, and neither of the young pirates spoke much. Barbossa went from congenial, if not direct in his requests of Sparrow, to cool and at times even spiteful. It was clear that that wall was there now, and Jack wasn't going to be getting through it any time soon. Not for his lack of trying of course.

It was early that day, before even the sun was up, and the light on the horizon was only vague and soft blue, hard a difference between it and the darkness of sea and sky. Hector hadn't slept. He hadn't been sleeping much at all these last few days.

Today was the day; they would never be closer to Nassau than they were right now. Hector could see the faint plot of land far off, for the moment, just an odd shadow on the water. But if they continued their course, by nightfall again he'd be able to see it from a distance, probably close enough to make out the hills and the tops of the trees, maybe even some of houses if they passed at the right place. Maybe Governor Rogers' home even. It had been so high on the hill, it felt like a castle. But he remembered the fire, and James Bonny, and wondered if it weren't all burned to the ground now.

The particular thought soured him so much that he nearly wept in frustration. Luckily there was no one around to see his tears. Only a few of the crew were on deck at this hour, and the rest, including the Captain and higher ranking sailors were all still abed.

A cold wind gusted across the deck and Hector shivered under it, pulling the collar of his shirt up closer around his neck, wrapping his arms around himself as he dropped down below the rail, attempting to take shelter from its bite.

Jack didn't understand what his well-intentioned foolishness had cost him. He didn't understand...oh how could he? To Jack this ship was probably home. He seemed so sure and sound walking her decks, even in his quieter moments, the old vessel seemed to bring him comfort.

Barbossa didn't have that. Home was a vague idea in his mind, a fantasy. He thought he had found it once before, but it had been lost. Now he turned his sights to Nassau hoping to return to the only other place he'd ever felt a sort of kinship. He needed to know if his mother was still alive. He needed to know if she and Rackham and Mary had survived the attack. He had lost Dayana, and she had loved him despite him being a burden. He wasn't willing to let the only remaining family he had slip into oblivion, forgotten and forsaken.

He felt himself crying again and put his head against his knees, glad for the dark and the wind and the solitude. He was a man now, free to make his own way and make his own home wherever he should choose. So why did he want to go back to Nassau so badly, knowing danger was the only certainty?

He wasn't really sure. But when he had been there, when Calico and Mary...even Ann... had at last realized who he was, what he was, they wanted him. Despite him knowing nothing of

pirating, and little of sailing, and being only good at brawling about with his fists...they wanted him. Hector needed that again. Sao had loved him so much, and then it had all fell apart. He was discarded, like old trash. A burden, a disgrace. Unwanted, unloved.

He shut his eyes tight and willed himself to fall asleep. His head hurt and his heart hurt more. He had to stop being so soft, softness got you nowhere softness got you killed in most cases. But the tears didn't stop. Not for a long time. But the rocking of the deck and soft sound of the waves eventually lulled him to sleep.

A hand shook him lightly and Hector lifted his stiff neck, looking up in confusion. Tobes was looking back at him under the fringe of his blonde curls, the stubble on his face getting thicker by the day. "Alright there, sailor? Sleepin' on deck this close to the rail isn't a practice I recommend. Never know when a rogue wave might come, pull ya over for a swim."

Barbossa groaned softly and rubbed his sunburned neck, stretching to straighten his cramped back and shoulders. Tobes helped him up. Together they looked out at the horizon to the west, and Hector could see that indeed they had drifted closer to the island, which was more than just a vague dot now. If he squinted in the sun, he could make out moving dots along its waters. Other ships.

"Don't suppose you were up here because you were thinking of making a run for it," the First Mate asked casually without looking at the younger man.

Hector just sneered, moving off to find the barrel of drinking water and a wash basin so he could rinse some of the salt and sweat from his skin. Tobes followed him.

"The Brethern Coast consists of a great many good pirates, Hector, despite what the rumors say. I'm sure they have everything well in hand, whatever their troubles with the English and the Spanish...and whoever else. You needn't risk your life to run to their rescue."

"But it's fine for me to risk my life for your Captain." The redhead mumbled in response, dumping a hefty ladle of water over his head to wash off the grime, letting it soak his clothes as well, knowing they would dry quickly in the heat of the day.

Tobes didn't have an answer for this, he just folded his thick arms across his bare chest and studied the lad for awhile.

"Those marks upon your back," he began, "how did you earn them?"

Hector didn't answer. His expression was tight-lipped and angry.

"I've laid lash to skin before. I know how deep it cuts, I know it can be deadly. Those wounds—so many of them appear to have healed at the same time. Whoever beat you intended to take your life."

"What of it?"

"That's cruelty."

"The world is cruel."

"Aye, it is, but it doesn't answer my question. What did you do to earn them?"

"I defended myself against a crew mate. I fought back. I refused to lie down and die, that's what I did." He glared back at Tobias, angry for being prodded about his past, but angrier still at the look of pity in his eyes. "Save yer sorrows for someone who needs it."

"There's pity enough in seeing a man try to throw away his own life." Tobes answered seriously. Hector tried to ignore him, tried to walk away. He was done with this conversation and just wanted to be alone, to lose himself in work.

"Do not think too poorly of Jack,"

The change in subject surprised the other man, making him pause in his retreat.

"The boy seems a fool, and gods know he can be. But very few people hold his interest for very long. You, however," The older man chuckled, scratching his chin and turned to walk away. "for some reason, he just can't seem to look away."

The other sailor thought on this for awhile, then shook it off. Tobes was just trying to distract him with nonsense. And it didn't really matter if Jack's intentions had been pure or not. Hector didn't need trouble like Jack Sparrow trying to cozy up to him, if that's what the other man had meant...but it wasn't. Was it?

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Barbossa made his way over to the hammock, the only one still occupied in the hold. The one filling it was curled up into a bit of ball, face nearly smothered by his arms, which seemed to be trying to wrap themselves around his head and cover himself completely. He must have gotten hot during the night, for he could not spot a blanket anywhere. The little bit of Jack's Sparrow's face that he could see was serene in sleep, obviously lost in a dream so deep that no shouting from the deck nor thundering of feet could rouse.

Hector smirked.

He readily grabbed the edge of the hammock with both hands and heaved upward. With a loud shrieking yelp, Jack hit the floor with a thud, flat on his face.

"What the bloody hell-!?" he snapped, whipping his head up and around to see his attacker. His scowl deepened when he saw who it was.

"The sun's been up for two hours," Hector said, folding his arms across his chest. "The rest of the crew are up and attending to their work. All but you, ye great lazy carcass!"

Jack pulled himself into a sitting position, rubbing the lump upon his forehead where it had collided sharply with the deck. "Ye needn't be so rough about it!" he barked.

He leered up into the pale face of his fellow crewman. It was clear that Hector hadn't forgiven him for his blunder, but at least the man was *speaking* to him today, rather than just barking orders and insults at him as he had before. It was progress, Jack supposed. Slow, agonizing, annoying progress.

Jack got to his feet, pushing his loose hair out of his face. "Yer in a fine mood today," he snarled, smoothing out his clothes and adjusting his head scarf. "Someone piss in yer porridge?"

The older man smirked at the remark. “Alright, enough. Top side now, before I box yer ears!” he warned.

Face twisted in pent-up frustration, Jack moved roughly past the other man and made his way towards the deck. Hector lingered behind a moment, watching him with an eagle eye and with a sigh followed after him.

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Barbossa leaned leisurely against the side of the rail, watching with smug satisfaction as Jack scrubbed on his hands and knees, grumbling bitterly to himself as he raked the brush back and forth over the filthy deck. It was good to see the lad knocked down a notch or two. “Ye missed a spot!” he called out to the younger man, who shivered visibly with indignity and glared daggers at him over his shoulder.

The pale man smirked when Jack turned back to his work, scrubbing twice as hard as his grumblings increased. His pale eyes wandered to Jack’s back side, watching it sway slightly as the pirate scrubbed. He knew he shouldn’t be thinking such things, especially about Jack Sparrow, but he could hardly deny what was in front of his own eyes. Thoughtfully he bit in the ripe green apple in his palm, eyes fixed forward.

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Jack’s whole body ached from the rigorous tasks that Barbossa had put him through. Not only had he scrubbed the deck till his fingers were sore and cramped and splinter-riddled, but he also set him to work scrubbing pots in the galley—and utter indignity for poor old Jack—and other mindlessly boring tasks.

He was currently slumped over a bit railing, trying to catch his breath and ease the ache in his muscles when his tormentor came upon him.

“What now...?” Jack groaned. “I’ve done everything ye asked, and if you think I’m cleanin’ that galley again, I’ll—!”

Barbossa shoved a bowl of soup into his hands. “Eat, you’ve earned it.” he grunted.

Jack hissed as the steaming liquid sloshed a bit over his hands, but soon forgot the pain and blinked up at Barbossa who was almost smiling at him. “I’m impressed. Ye can work, when forced.” he grunted, taking a sip from his own bowl.

Jack scowled, brows knitting together haughtily. “ ‘Course I can. I was born at sea, I know how to attend to a ship!” he insisted.

The copper-haired man smirked a bit. “That so?”

“Aye, *that’s so*.” Jack snapped back, drinking the hot watery bowl of broth in several hurried gulps before thrusting it back into Barbossa’s grip. “You act like I’m some pampered land-lubber wot don’t know his mast from his keel, we’ll I’ll tell you something you sack of—.”

What Barbossa was a sack of exactly was never disclosed. The Captain had made himself known then, for he had spent lengthy hours in his own quarters, pouring over maps and had neither been seen nor heard from since sunset the evening before.

Teague strolled slowly through the crowded deck, dark kohl lined eyes searching out something. They fell upon Jack and Barbossa, standing there idly. He said not a word as he came to stand in front of them, eyeing them mutely.

“Captain, sir?” Jack asked, for even his own son referred to him by his proper title. Teague would have it no other way.

“Did I say anything to you, boy?” the older man grunted, dark eyes flickering towards his son’s. Jack shook his head, going quiet. Teague surveyed the two of them for a long moment, making each feel deeply scrutinized and uncomfortable.

“Something I can do for ye, Captain?” Hector ventured then, knowing he was speaking out of turn but wanting anything to break that uncomfortable silence between them. Teague said nothing and continued to look at them hard for a moment.

“No. Carry on gentlemen,” he muttered after a moment and then continued to saunter on his way, swaying with slight unsteadiness. Once he’d gone, both young men breathed a little sigh of relief and Jack chuckled softly.

“I hate it when he does that. Thinks he’s right clever, that just staring at you in silence will make you confess all your sins. Never worked on me.”

Barbossa didn’t say anything and Jack’s face fell a bit. “I had no idea he would take your ring. And I certainly didn’t think he would suggest flogging you. That must have been humiliating.”

“Aye, it was.” The other man spat, glaring hard at him. Jack tried to look passive to the other man’s anger, but at that moment it just wasn’t possible. The remorse was evident.

“I’ll make it up to you. At least let me try.”

Barbossa scoffed, “There isn’t anything I want from you, Sparrow, ‘cept perhaps fer ye to make my job easier and do as you ought. There’s a pair of sails over there that needs mending, suggest you give me a hand.”

Jack wilted and didn’t say anything else. And while they were hard at their task, working under the hot, rising morning sun, the dark-haired youth spoke barely two words to his shipmate. At first Hector was grateful for the silence, but after awhile it started to concern him. He hadn’t known Jack very long, but even their short acquaintance told him that silence meant something was going on inside the other man’s head.

Maybe Tobes was right, maybe he had been a bit hard on Jack. It wasn’t his fault Teague had reacted the way he did, and Hector’s own tongue was truly what had sealed his fate.

He glanced in the other man’s direction and studied his face in silence. Jack was quick with a needle and his stitches were smooth and precise. Like he had already said, this was something he must have learned from a young age, and it was all second nature to him now.

“What if I got the ring back for you?” Jack said suddenly, without preamble. Hector’s eyes widened and he raised his brows in surprise and then scoffed softly.

“That would be a fool’s errand, even for you. Forgive me if I’ve had enough of your way of



convincing the Captain of things. It doesn't seem to work in my favor."

"No," Jack continued. "I mean, steal it back."

"Yer daft."

But Jack didn't seem put off. In fact, there was a slight twinkle in his dark eyes now. "I make it work to my advantage."

Barbossa almost laughed. He assumed Jack was musing, just trying to win back his favor. He let it go at that. The boy couldn't really be reckless enough to try stealing something from his own father, who obviously showed him little in the way of special treatment. If he were caught, Teague would have him locked in the brig like any other crewmen. Hell, he might even do worse just because it was Jack.

Another crewmen passed them then, this one a lanky fellow with long snarls of brown hair, and large hands and feet that seemed disproportionate to the rest of him. He also sported a mustache that was shaped and groomed and reminded everyone of the French. "Jonah," Jack called suddenly, reaching up and catching his hand, plucking the man back towards them. "Tell me mate, what's the plan for later?"

Jonah smiled at Jack in a bright, mischievous way, but then glanced worriedly at Barbossa. "Uh, I'm not sure. Best ask Cookie what he thinks of it."

"Thinks of what?" Hector asked bluntly, staring at the two of them.

"Nothing! Just a friendly game of dice between a couple of friends. Sure you wouldn't be interested..." Jonah muttered. He looked uncomfortable at the idea of Hector even overhearing the conversation, which of course lead Barbossa to believe that something other than gambling was set to take place.

"Ah, luv, don't fuss so." Jack replied, and to Hector's surprise he pulled Johan down close enough to kiss his cheek. "Tell Cookie we had an agreement, savvy?"

Jonah's swarthy face was suddenly a shade darker with heat in his cheeks. "Aye, Jackie. Whatever you say."

The man hurried away and Barbossa watched him go, taking careful note of the man that he'd barely noticed before. Jack went back to his stitching, looking quietly smug, and started humming and singing to himself.

Finally it got the better of Hector. "Had no idea you were interested in that sort of thing," he muttered. "You'd best be careful."

"Don't know what you mean, mate." Jack replied airily, pulling the string taught before biting off the loose bit and spitting it out again.

Hector looked at him flatly. "Know him well do you?"

"What business is it of yours?"

"Dammit, Sparrow, I don't care what you do in the dark, alright? But I need to know...what the Captain thinks of it. Understand?"

"Why, so you can tell on me?" Jack mocked. "Please, Barbossa. Spare me your attempts to save me

from sin. It won't work, mate. It's just my nature." He stood, his work finished, and stretched, scratching his bushy hair and came to stand lazily next to the red head. Hector felt the faint shiver of steel ghost against the side of his neck as Jack brushed his knife along it lightly. "But don't be sayin' anything to Captain. It'll get ugly. For both of us."

If it was a threat, it was an odd one because Hector felt no fear nor even anger. In fact, the way Jack was standing, faintly teasing him with his weapon, so close they could almost touch, looking him in the eye, Hector felt a thrill go through him and a twitch in his groin. He licked his lips unconsciously and smiled smugly. "Have it yer way, Jack."

The blade left his neck, replaced by the light brush of fingers moving his hair aside and tucking it behind his ear.

"Much obliged. Now...is there anything else?"

Barbossa didn't get up, keeping the sail in his lap so Jack wouldn't notice that his breeches had suddenly become much tighter on him. "No, that be all for now. Off with ye."

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Hector did not sleep well that evening. He had retired early, out of lack of interesting things to keep himself occupied with, and it was cooler below deck at any rate. He was dozing in his hammock, dreaming of things half-forgotten. Foggy things that made him think of another time and another place...

A noise roused him from his half-sleep and he grunted impatiently. Opening his eyes, he looked about the darkened deck, wondering what had awakened him. There was nothing in his immediate line of sight, but he could sense a presence close by. Sitting up quickly and pulling on his trousers once more, he padded his way silently across the dark hold in bare feet.

There was a good deal of grunting going on from whoever it was there in the dark with him, not to mention a few very distressed sounds. Hector could guess from this alone that it was more than likely he did not want to see what was lingering there in the dark, but then he paused, transfixed.

In the little pools of light created by the cracks from the upper deck above them, Hector could make out the face of at least one of the two men, who were pushed up against the wall, tucked into the corner near the galley.

Jack's face, eyes heavy lidded, sighing and grunting faintly as the taller man ground against him.

Hector's cheeks flushed at the sight and he retreated a little further back into the shadows, knowing this wasn't a sight meant for his eyes. Yet he couldn't look away. He kept staring at Jack's face, the shape of his mouth, the faint sheen of sweat on his skin, the sound of his sighs. He felt that warm throb in his guts again and bit his lower lip. Of all people in the world, he should not be thinking of Jack Sparrow this way, but he couldn't help himself.

But the longer he lingered, the more he realized that Jack seemed much less engaged in the activities at hand than his partner, who Hector recognized as Jonah. It was the taller, lankier man who seemed to be moving the most, indeed, making the most noise, one hand around Jack while the other was flattened to the wall above them, fingers scraping along the wood. Hector heard him whispering and muttering the most filthy things under his breath. Jack didn't seem to say much in reply, he just smiled and would mumble something encouraging.

Jonah seemed to be picking up speed then, near completion. His breath was harsh and his words were sputtering.

“That’s it, luv...”

Hector heard Jack say and the next minute the other man groaned, pushed hard against the smaller man and cursed. He saw Jack wince and sigh, and then the two quickly separated. It was then that he realized Jack was still fully clothed, and that it had been only Jonah with his pants down. Sparrow cleaned his hand on a rag as the lankier man laughed and licked his lips.

“Damn, Jack. That was a good ‘un.”

“Thankee darlin’. But now to business. You remember your end of this deal, yeah?”

“Right, right, o’ course. Can’t see what the fuss is about though, couldn’t you just wait until—“

“No, mate. It has to be this way, trust me. And I’ll thank you kindly for your discretion, savvy?”

“Right, Jackie. Whatever you want.”

The man finished lacing his breeches, turned and made towards where Barbossa was hiding. He ducked back further into the dark, holding his breath and Jonah passed without seeing him. Jack soon followed, and Hector tried to decide if he should make his presence known or not. This seemed dangerous, whatever Jack was doing. Favors like this could turn bad quickly, especially with both parties trapped aboard a ship with nowhere to go.

But if he did confront Jack, what would he say to him? And what was more, he couldn’t stop picturing him pressed up against the wall, swaying and sighing...

He bit back a moan and waited until Jack disappeared onto the upper deck before hurriedly returning to his own hammock, hoping to find some quick relief and that sleep would blot out the rest of these thoughts before they became too much.

He was seriously beginning to question whether or not the sun and salt water had started to muddle his brains; it seemed he couldn’t make up his mind about Sparrow, any more than the other man could make up his mind about him. He was vexing and alluring and fascinating all at once. But it didn’t matter; from the answer Jack had given earlier he knew Teague wouldn’t approve of any sort of relationship between them that bordered on the carnal...much less the romantic.

Hector slid his hand down his pants and moaned into his hand. It was the first time since Sao that he had ever thought about another man this way. No wonder he was tense and burning, it’d been so long since these sort of thoughts had entered his mind that he almost didn’t recognize them. He told himself it was just loneliness and the fact that Jack was beautiful. But it was more than that...he just didn’t know what to call it.

He reached the edge quickly and harshly, leaving him lying there, pink faced and shivering in the dark, glad no one else seemed to hear him. As his pulse began to calm again he buried his face into the crook of his elbow and tried to will himself to sleep. Not to think about Jack, or Sao or anything. To go blank and still. He could hear the ocean sloshing gently against the haul of the ship, and the rhythmic sound lulled him into senselessness again.

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Hector woke much later that night to the low peels of thunder and the uneasy rocking of the ship. Above his head, rain thundered down on the deck in a heavy, steady drone and he shivered. Sudden storms at sea, especially those that came upon a ship in the middle of the night, unnerved him.

He climbed from his swinging hammock, seeing that most of the other crewmen were already up as well, and made his way up the stairs to the main deck. The steps were slick with rain, and he had to raise his hand above his head to be able to see for the sheets of it that were coming down.

Lightning flashed, and in the few seconds of illumination, he could see the crew standing at their stations across the deck, getting the sails tied tightly and securing the rigging. A figure thundered past him across the deck and he called out to them, but they either didn't hear him or ignored him.

He climbed fully aboard the deck, already drenched and tried to fumble his way through dark and the water. Lightning crackled again, this time forking through the sky and crashing down into the waves about a mile away from them.

Hector stared at the spectacle, but then looked beyond it. To his great shock he realized that the storm had blown them closer towards the island, close enough that he could make out vague outlines of other ships in the distance, also bobbing and rocking in the waves.

He fought his way to the rail, squinting through the dark and the rain and wind, trying to see. Behind him, he heard Teague bellowing to his crew, ordering them to stay fast, hold the lines and brace themselves as they attempted to ride out the worst of squall.

Hearing the Captain brought Hector out of his trance and made him shake the rain from his eyes again, looking around at the crew rather than the port in the distance. The waves were fierce, crashing up on deck and trying to sweep any unwitting sailor overboard. He saw several struggling, but their compatriots were quick to brace them.

Where was Jack?

Hector fought his way back across swaying deck, looking desperately into the faces of the crew, hoping to find Jack among them, but he had no luck.

He was just about to fight his way back down below deck and start searching there, when he chanced a glimpse of the very man, emerging from the Captain's quarters. Feeling his stomach lurch with relief, he started fighting his way towards him. "SPARROW!"

Jack looked up in surprise, and through the silver curtain of rain Barbossa could see him shoving something inside his shirt pocket. But the momentary distraction proved dangerous. At that same moment the ship gave a violent rock to the right side, sending men shouting and sprawling as their feet were swept out from under them and the ocean sloshed over them.

Both Hector and Jack lost their footing, both sliding across the slick wood towards the rail. Jack hit it first and pitched forward with a shout, nearly going over. Hector shouted, grabbed the back of his shirt and yanked him back against him with all his might. Jack collided violently against him, but Barbossa barely registered it, wrapping one arm tightly around the smaller man's

torso while the other knotted itself in the rat lines and held on for dear life. Waves washed over them, dousing and choking them, trying to drag them over the side as they were pelted with loose debris that was already being swept overboard.

“Don’t let go!” Hector screamed.

“Wasn’t counting on it!” Jack shouted back, digging his hands into the other man’s flesh with bruising force, to be held just as tightly in return.

Hector was terrified, rasping for air as the rain tried to drown them from above as well as the sea below. If he lost his grip, if they went over, that was it. He was done for.

Slowly, the ship started to even out, and the water became less violent. He heard shouts and someone else had their hands on them, pulling them back away from the rail, dragging them back towards the mast.

“Hang on lads!”

It was Teague, though he hardly looked himself, wild and drenched, his normally drooping eyes wide and full of fire.

His trembling hands managed to guide them back below deck. “Stay here!” he bellowed. Behind him, Hector could see that another ship was approaching them off the port bow. He nodded to show he understood and Teague closed the hatch, blotting out the sound of rain and wind for a moment.

After a few moments, Jack finally lifted his head and started to release his bruising grip upon Hector’s limbs as the other man did the same. They knelt together on the floor in the swaying lantern light, looking at each other’s dripping forms, breathing hard as they tried to reconcile that neither of them were indeed dead.

“What were you doing out there?” Hector rasped then. “You should have stayed in the cabin if that’s where you were! You could have died!”

“I wasn’t supposed to *be* in the cabin,” Jack replied, removing his scarf and wringing the excess water out. “If the Captain had caught me in there, I surely would have died.”

“What are ye--?”

Jack reached into the wet fabric clinging to his chest and held out his hand. Barbosa stared, breathless, at the sight of Calico Jack’s ring, resting in the center of his palm.

“Go on, take it. It’s yours.”

“By the powers...” Hector plucked it out of his hand and held it for a moment, hardly able to believe what he was seeing. “Ye risked yer neck to get me back this...this...?”

“Well, it wasn’t as heroic as all that. I made a deal wit a friend of mine; he has a penchant for jewelry of the same type. He traded one of his to me, and I left that in place of yours in the Captain’s safe. He’ll never notice.” He shrugged, pushing his sopping black tendrils of hair from his face. “The storm, I admit, was an unexpected distraction but, it certainly worked to my favor eh? Just like I said.” He grinned again, hoping that at last this would end the bad blood between them.

Hector frowned, looking at Jack with over bright eyes in the lantern light. “You idiot.”

He muttered.

“What?”

“You idiot, you stupid, careless git--!” He grabbed the younger man and dragged him forward, hugging him hard to him. “You shouldn’t have done it.”

Jack was frozen, breathless in his arms, but then melted into the embrace. “I owed you, mate.”

Hector held him tighter, then slowly withdrew, looking slightly ashamed of his emotional display. “Call us square, Jack.” He took the ring, tied it on a bit leather and put it around his neck to hide it from Teague’s sight.

The pair looked up towards the deck above them again, hearing the pounding of the rain slowly begin to ease, the heave and swell of the waves beginning to lessen into a milder rocking. People were moving about more freely now, and they could hear voices again instead of just thunderclaps.

“We should go above, see if we’re needed.” Hector said, starting towards the hatch, but Jack snatched his hand and tugged him back down.

“If the Captain needs us, he can fetch us.”

“Yer standing awful close, Jack.”

“Aye.”

Sparrow pressed himself up against him, looking at him expectantly. “What are you going to do about it?”

The familiar smirk came across Hector’s lips, and he grabbed the dark haired man by the back of his head and tugged him closer still, swooping down to kiss him.

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## Chapter 5

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Above deck, things were a little less serene. Though the storm had lessened, The Misty Lady was far from out of danger. Another ship had been blown towards her in the gale, and had just barely managed to keep from ramming the ship head on, though it's figurehead had scrapped along the port side of the deck, damaging two or three of the gun ports, snaring and tangling several of the lines from the mast, but not much else.

The other ship belonged to another pirate, this one hailing from France and the waters of the Mediterranean. He was friendly company, and over the prevailing wind and persistent drum of rain, the Captains called out to each other over the thin gap between their ships.

"Are any of your crew injured, Captain Teague?" A man in a heavy pale blue frock coat adorned with lace collar and sleeves called to the pirate lord.

"Nay! The damage is glancing Chevallier, we'll manage. And yourself?"

"Much the same! If you are able to make way once we are free of these lines, I suggest you do so!" the Frenchmen called back.

"Is the port not safe?" the swarthy called back, rain and salt water stinging his eyes.

"The Royal Navy's been kept at bay for some time, but there's trouble among the Brethren there! I wouldn't risk it if I were you, Captain!" he called back.

Teague nodded slowly. His gaze moved past the neighboring ship towards the port beyond, hearing the vague sounds of canon fire and the tiny wisps of smoke that survived the pour of rain.

"Aye, we make way." He called back.

As the crew struggled to untangle themselves from the other ship, below deck, Hector and Jack were examining the damage to the gun ports.

"Awful mess," Jack muttered, carefully stepping over splinters of wood and broken nails as he made his way across the floor, lantern held aloft to light his way. He crawled up next to one of the shorn and wrecked ports and poked his head out of the hole into the haze beyond. The other ship was in an arm's reach, and when he looked up he could see the two crews laboring to undo the damage and break away.

"It's going to take an hour at least to sort that all out," he sighed. Hector was at his back, or so he thought. "Lucky though it wasn't any worse. The Misty Lady's a sound vessel alright, but I'm not sure I'd bet on her to withstand being taken at full broadside by another ship nearly the same size."

When Hector had no commentary to offer, Jack turned, the lantern light swaying in the dark. “Hector? You there?”

The redhead was several ports down, where the gun ports were free of obstruction from the other ship, staring out into the dark. “Come look at this,” he called quietly. Jack followed him, leaning against his shoulder in an attempt to see what had captured the other man’s interest. “Something exciting out there?”

The pair stared together through the silvery curtain of rain towards the island beyond, where faint lights glittered at the water’s edge and they could hear the occasional off-setting rumble of a canon being fired under the fading din of thunderclaps.

“Looks like a busy night to me in Nassau port,” Jack muttered. “Look there, more ships trying to leave. Must be some trouble if even more pirates are that anxious to get out on the open water in the middle of all this.”

“Aye,” Barbossa nodded, and Jack could feel the tension under his skin.

Far above them they could hear the Captains calling orders to their men, but the wind made it too difficult to catch their words. Barbossa looked back out at the water, which had turned black and grey as gunpowder under the churning sky, and the water was choppy and rough. He felt an instant, queasy fear in the pit of his stomach and ducked his head back in from the hole, looking suddenly pale and sick.

Jack clutched his arm. “You alright, luv?”

Hearing the term of endearment made Hector smile, but he shook his head slowly. “Sorry,” he mumbled. “Rough seas don’t always agree with me.”

“You and every other sailor,” Jack quipped, and Hector mustered a small chuckle and said nothing else, absently reaching to stroke the ring that now hung around his neck.

“It’s your parents you’re after out there, that it?” the man beside him asked quietly. “You think they might be in trouble?”

“I don’t know. Considering the bounty on both I’d say trouble would be sure to find them wherever they ventured, but...I don’t know where else to start looking. To start asking. Can ye understand?”

Jack nodded, and Hector looked back out at the dark water again, sweat beading his skin, trying to muster his courage and decide—where to go, what to do?

Sparrow looked at him a moment longer in the dark and then turned and moved across deck to the other side, moving a canon out of the way so that he could clearly see through the port hole. But rather than look out at the water, he was staring straight up.

“The long boat is right above us here,” he said thoughtfully.

Hector raised a brow, “Aye, what of it? Is it damaged too?”

“Not likely. But, if you’re nimble enough I think we can climb to it.” He turned his head slowly to look back at his mate to see if his meaning had sunk in. From the look of the whites in Barbossa’s eyes, Jack could tell it had.

“Yer not suggestin’—“



“You want to go to Nassau, this is your chance. That lot up there’s too preoccupied with the other ship to notice, and in this mist we won’t be seen if we’re careful.”

“*We?*” Hector balked, shaking his head and moving closer to him, lantern in hand. “Yer mad, I’m not taking you—“

“I’m not asking. I’m *tellin’*. I go with you, or we call the whole thing off.” He folded his arms across his chest, staring resolutely at the older sailor, daring him to argue. “You need me.”

“Ha! And how do you figure that?”

“Been four years since set foot on those shores. Maybe you remember the way, maybe you don’t. Ah, but lucky you, I know the port too, and moreover I know which pirates ye can trust. So you need me, unless you want to get that pretty neck of yours slit. And that would be such a shame, really.” He leaned forward and placed a little kiss there, making Hector smile and shiver faintly. “Cause I’m awfully fond of that neck. And those freckles.”

Hector twisted a finger through Jack’s wild black hair and pulled him close. “Alright, Sparrow, you made yer point. But this is not a game, I’m sure ya know. I need to trust ye can keep yer wits about ya should we encounter the unpleasant.”

“Mate, nothing out there is going to be *half* as unpleasant as the Captain if he catches us.”

They nodded and Jack moved again to the port hole, carefully climbing out of the narrow round opening and latching onto the outer haul of the ship, fingers desperate for any foothold they could find. Hector stuck his head out behind him and held his breath, white-knuckled as he watched the smaller man slither his way up along the rain-slick wood towards the suspended boat above.

After ten nerve-wracking minutes, Sparrow at last managed to scramble inside the water logged long-boat, slowly lowering it down from its pully towards where Barbossa waited. Jack reached out his hand for him, and Hector took it and leapt inside.

The boat rocked crazily for a moment as result, making the older sailor gasp loudly and clutch the sides in fear. Jack tensed as well but remained calm until it began to slow, then continued the descent below into the water.

They had just about reached the surf when they heard The Misty Lady’s rudder creak and groan as the ship turned, now free from its entanglement, and began to change course.

Cursing, Jack rose and slashed the rope lines still binding them to ship. The longboat dropped into the water with a splash and rocked ominously for a moment, making Hector shout again.

“Steady, steady!” Jack shouted, gripping the sides and staring his shipmate hard in the face. “Keep still, she’ll right herself!”

“If we capsize I’m going to kill you!” Hector hissed back through clenched teeth. Jack could see in his face that he was truly terrified of this idea, and it puzzled him, for though the water was rough and unpleasant, they were still within a reasonable distance of land and other ships that drowning could be staved off.

Above them, The Misty Lady turned against the rolling tide, her sails down, allowing the wind to pull her away from the harbor as Chevallier’s ship Fancy followed in her wake.

Jack grabbed the oars and began to row hard and fast, getting them away from the ship's undertow and keeping them from being dashed to bits.

After a few moments, Barbossa moved to sit beside him, taking one of the oars from his hands and helping him to row, the pair using all their strength to get them to shore as quickly as possible. Under the cover of darkness, they wouldn't easily be seen by The Misty Lady, but neither would they be seen by any other ships that might pass them in the harbor, and that could mean death.

Through the fog and rain they could see the pale yellow gleam of the lighthouse, and beyond that a larger, looming outline that rose above the dark palm thatched roofs. The clouds above them started to clear as the storm around them stuttered and stalled, and there Hector could see the tall stone walls of the old fort.

As they rowed, small bonfires became apparent on the beach, as well as a great deal of commotion. There were ships of varying sizes, some not much bigger than their own, others full sized sloops, schooners and luggers, were all trying to make their way away from the harbor.

A small lugger passed them in the dark, and a man aboard deck called out to them. "Where ye be headed?"

"To port, where else?" Jack shouted back.

"Take shelter for the night if you must, but don't linger! The Navy's bearing down on this island, they'll be here in a few days, provided the storm doesn't sink 'em, though I doubt we've much luck!"

"Have you any word of Captain Rackham? Or Captain Bonny?!" Hector shouted. Jack tried to shush him, but it was too late.

The man aboard the passing ship looked back at them, following along the rail to keep them in sight as they sloshed by in the choppy water. "Yer lookin' for Rackham?"

"Well I wouldn't call it *looking* per say," Jack fumbled, trying to brush it off as curiosity, much to Hector's annoyance and befuddlement. But the man on the lugger only answered them with an unsettling, snide sort of laughter. "If it's Rackham yer looking for, you'll be sure to find 'im. Look beyond the wall, back to the northern side of the island. You'll find 'im there!"

He moved out of ear shot then and Hector took to the rows again, more earnestly, anxious to make it to shore, while Jack sat quiet and pondering for a moment. "I don't like the way he said that."

"Nevermind it, the fact is that Rackham's here. That's all I need to know."

The tide carried them onto the beach, and as they pulled the boat further up along the sand to keep it from being swept back into the sea, Jack turned and looked back out at the horizon. He could still make out The Misty Lady in the distance. Clearly Teague hadn't realized they were gone yet. Jack shifted anxiously, chewing on his knuckle for a moment as he thought about the towering temper his father would be in to find him gone.

Wringing out his soaking shirt, Hector followed his gaze and then sighed heavily. "Go on then. If you leave now, you can probably still catch up with them before the tide is out."

"What?" Jack sputtered, turning again to look at his taller, paler shipmate.

“This is my task, Jack, not yours. I thank ye for helpin’ me, but I have no right to drag you into danger that you have nothing to do with.”

“Well it’s a bit late for that, don’t you think?” Jack shook his head, the sopping wet tails of his headscarf sticking to his neck and shoulder. “You need someone who knows how to talk to these types, and I’m just the man for the job.” He smiled roguishly again and pulled the other sopping wet pirate to him. “Besides, I’ve only kissed you once. Now, I don’t know about you, but that seems a frightfully insufficient amount of time to have spent with those wonderful lips of yours.” He leaned up and kissed Hector this time, and felt a flutter in his stomach, as well a steady wave of relief from the contact.

The pair kissed for several long seconds on the beach, clinging to each other while the adrenaline and euphoria that had previously possessed them began to wear off, leaving them with the stark reality that they were now stranded on Providence Island among what could be hostile pirates and the impending threat of an attack by the royal navy. But for that moment, all that felt small compared to the feeling that was growing between them.

Hector pulled free eventually, smiling and lying his forehead against Jack’s for a moment while he attempted to catch his breath. “Alright then. No turning back. Stay close to me, alright?”

“As if you have to ask.” Jack nodded as they started up the beach, almost shoulder to shoulder.

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The streets of the shanty town were dark, narrow and twisting, and though he pressed his memory for details, Hector soon realized he had no clear heading and no idea how to find his way from the “pirate” side of the island to the other side without a map.

But as they twisted and wound their way through the sand and gravel roads, Jack pulled him aside, ducking behind one of the houses, which seemed dark and empty. “You said there was a path through the jungle, right? A secret passage that bypasses all the booby traps that have been set out there?”

“Yes, but I can’t recall. Everything looks different now than it did.” He was profoundly frustrated by this fact.

“We’re going to need a guide then,” Sparrow suggested. He scanned the road ahead, which had lead them up a steadily increasing incline of a hill, and he could see more of the town from here, especially now that the rain had stopped completely. “Let’s head to the tavern, have us a drink and get sorted.”

“Jack, we don’t have time—“

“You want to chance walking into those trees in the dark? Be my guest. But I prefer to live mate, I would hope you would too.”

Barbossa sighed in frustration. “How do we know who we can trust here?”

“We don’t.”

“Comforting,” the taller man muttered, letting Jack lead him back down another narrow passage, though here there was a bit more semblance of road, and steps made from drift wood that helped negotiate the dunes and small cliffs that rose and fell around them.

Sure enough, Jack found the tavern with relative ease. As they approached the old building, the lights from inside causing the cracks between its shudders to glow jewel bright against the gloom, they could hear the rousing chorus of sea shanties, and drunken brawling and banter. Men’s loud raucous voices and women shrieking and cursing them.

As they approached, the doors came open and one such woman sent a drunkard spinning out into the street, where he went face down into the sand and dirt and laid there for several minutes in daze before he attempted to roll over, the whole act being about as affective as when a crab has been turned over on its back.

“Come back when you have some silver to spend, you filthy cad!” the woman laughed, pulling her shawl a little closer around her shoulders. She looked up then and caught sight of the two travelers standing there in the puddle of light created by the doorway.

“Well...welcome gents. You too look like you washed up on the beach and need a place to dry off.”

Neither of the young men said anything at first, though Jack started forward with his usual casual grace and charm, “You are indeed an astute woman,” he began. But as he moved closer, she pulled a sword from her skirts and pointed it at them casually. She made a little jab that threatened to poke Jack in his belly.

“Oy! Watch where you’re pointing that thing.”

Hector reached into his belt and pulled from the pocket there two Spanish dollars. “This be what yer after, miss?”

The woman immediately lowered her weapon, and waved them in. “Good man! Come in, come in!”

“Bloody pirates...” Jack muttered, following Hector’s lead.

Stepping inside the tavern, Hector was overwhelmed by a wave of nostalgia. He had been here before, to this same room with its clutter of chairs, warm lantern glow and the gleam of candles from the iron chandelier above and the overwhelming smell of sweat, salt, and stale ale. The only thing that kept a man from choking on the smell was the insistent waft of the ocean breeze rattling through the windows and doors. He recalled vividly when he had sat at these same tables, speaking to Calico Jack and Mary Read...he recalled the standoff with Woodes Rogers.

His palms began to sweat and he felt a lump in his throat. Four years; four years he’d been gone, traversing the ocean with Sao Feng, this would-be life forgotten. Not once had he ever returned to see what had become of his family. Back then he was still bitter, he hadn’t been able to see that Calico had been trying to save him. He only saw yet another abandonment. Now he feared he would be too late to rectify his mistake.

Jack’s hand slipped into his and squeezed lightly, bringing him back to the present with a moment of woozy clarity. Sparrow intuitively lead him to the nearest table and ushered him to sit down as a bar maid followed them, “What’s to yer liking gents? Food, drink, or pleasure?”

“Just the drinks luv,” Jack said, nudging Hector who came back to himself quickly

enough and produced one of the Spanish dollars. She made to snatch it, but the redhead pulled it back just out of her reach, causing her to look him in the eye.

“There’s another piece of silver in it for ya if ye can tell me how we might find our way to the former governor’s house beyond the wall. The whereabouts of Captain Bonny and Mary Read also be of interest, if ye have any knowledge.”

“What are they to you?”

“Old friends, shall we say.”

“Very old indeed,” she snatched the coins from him. “I can find you a guide to take you up the trail, but I wouldn’t travel there after dark if I were you. The jungle’s dangerous and there’s a bit of war on, since you seem to be ignorant of that.”

“What sort of war be that?”

“Same sort of war it usually is,” the girl answered. She had to be Hector’s age, black hair and green eyes, world weary and hardened by her lot in life. “A bloody squabble over treasure.”

Now both men leaned a bit closer in their seats. “Treasure, you say?” Jack quipped. “I find that hard to believe. Everyone knows the Brethern Coast is wealthy enough in their own right, that’s what keeps them here, despite the Navy constantly breathing down their necks. So what sort of treasure would be great enough to turn them on one another?”

“Sorry gents, that’s all a poor maid like meself knows.” She rattled the coins in her apron pocket. “I’ll be right back with those drinks.”

“And Bonny and Read? Any word of them?”

“Ann Bonny’s not been seen in this port for years, luv. As for Read, well, she was arrested some time ago, but whether or not those Englishmen still have ‘er is anyone’s guess. And that bit of information will cost you as well.”

Hector fetched out another piece of silver and tossed it to her, she caught it deftly and turned back to her task.

“Who’s Mary Read?” Jack asked quietly as they waited.

“First Mate of Captain Bonny,” Barbossa replied. “Dresses as a man, often called Mark.”

“Hmm. Odd.”

Hector had no commentary on the matter, eyeing the patrons out of the corner of his eye. They were a loud, slovenly lot, that looked like they had given up on life and mostly just wanted to drink their troubles away. Not that this was so different from every other tavern he’d ever been in, but there was a distinct air of disillusionment to this crowd that made him nervous. “I see now why the Captain was not apt to come here,” he said quietly to his partner. “These men are the ones left behind, the ones who can’t get out or won’t get out. They know what’s coming and that it might be the end...they just don’t have anything left to lose.”

“I agree,” Jack nodded. “Fact remains though, we need a guide to help get us to your Captain Rackham. They won’t come cheaply, I’m sure.”

The maid came with their drinks and left them to sit in front of them, and at her skirt tails

came a man, tall with dark skin and mean eyes. He had snowy white beard and wore a necklace of sea glass and shark teeth.

“Ye be wanting to know the way to the other side of the wall, that true?” he muttered.

Hector nodded, and the man pulled out a chair and sat down, nodding to the woman who excused herself.

The man eyed the two of them silently for a moment and then squinted at them, leaning back in his seat, long dirty fingers tapping at the hilt of his sword. “Ye two are not from these shores. Ne’re seen yer faces before. Where you hail from?”

“We sail with Captain Teague of the Brethren Court,” Jack said, proud and matter-of-factly, looking the older sailor down. “Perhaps you may have heard of him? Keeper of the Code and wot not?”

Their guest was clearly not impressed by this. He looked from Sparrow to Barbossa, hoping the other man would have more to offer him.

“What you’re asking is no small task. If I take you, what’s in it for me?”

“I’m willing to negotiate a price. What is it that ye want?”

The man let his eyes slide across the room, briefly glancing back at the bar, though he did not expect Hector to see this almost imperceptible glance. “Ye claim to have a ship...where is it now?”

“Waiting,” Hector lied. “Is it passage off this rock ye be wantin’?”

“Aye.”

“Well,” Jack quipped up again, “I think that could be arranged, providing you help us and the Captain be feelin’ generous, eh?” Without another word, and Jack reached for his, guzzling it down in quick gulps. The bar maid brought another pint to the table for their guide, who reached for it slow and took his time tasting it.

Hector was much slower, his mind overwhelmed. It was not like him to act so impulsively, and now that he was here, he realized that he had no plan. Even if he found Rackham, what was he supposed to do? What would he say? And what of Jack?

He looked up at the dark-haired man in front of him, who’s warm tan skin seemed to glow in the lantern light. “I wish you hadn’t come,” he muttered, absently swilling his drink.

Jack, emptying his tankard, looked up. “What are you on about?”

The guide stood then, glancing between the two of them. “Pardon me a moment, gentlemen. When you need me, I’ll be around the back.”

“Thanks mate, we’ll be right out.” Jack said, waving him off absently. The drink was going to his head faster than he realized, he was already half-forgetting what it was that was so very urgent that evening that they needed to find. The tavern was so warm and bright, and inviting. Outside it was damp and dark and miserable, and somewhere Teague was cursing him until no hell would have him. What was the rush? But Hector looked so forlorn, so lost. It was an expression that made his heart ache, despite the strange sleepy giddiness that was creeping over him.

Jack reached across the table and pressed his hand to Hector’s cheek, surprising the other

man. "What is it, luv? Hate to see you look like that...those sad eyes, break a man's heart you will. Finish yer drink and tell me your troubles."

"I don't know...I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know why I came back here." He felt frustration and anxiety welling up in his stomach, and he took a deeper drink, trying to drown out the sensation. "I was a stupid, useless boy then. And I'm no better now...what do I have to offer a man like him?"

"Mate, you are *far* from useless," Jack quipped, his voice a little heavier and slightly slurred now. "If I had a ship of my own, and I had a man like you aboard it, I would be very pleased indeed. And not just because of yer...what you call it...?...*Intelligence* with the various tongues you speak, but you're absolutely flawless with a sword and deadly with a pistol. What more does a pirate need, eh?"

He waved the bar maid over, wanting another refill and Hector gently tugged the tankard away from him. "Yer already half in yer glass, Sparrow. Eat something, or we'll waste the evening."

"You worry too much." He leaned over and pecked the man lovingly on the cheek as he pulled the cup away and held it out to the maid, who was all too keen to refill it for him. She glanced behind her at the bar keep and then again at Hector's own nearly full cup.

"Something wrong, luv? Not as thirsty as your friend?"

He glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, beneath the fringe of his damp hair. "Mind yer business." He muttered.

She snorted and turned, skirts swirling and made her way back to the bar. As Jack drank, Hector eyed the room again. He spotted the stairs that lead up to the rooms above. He was sure he could remember the same he had been held captive in, the same where he had laid eyes on Ann in the flesh for the first time. He wondered, vaguely, if she had forgotten him as easily as she had before after they had parted.

He thought about her warm blood on his hands, the feel of her heavy body as he tried to get her out of the burning house. How he had taken a life for the first time to avenge her. It was becoming somewhat foggy in his mind. A mild ache had begun at the back of his head, making him wince, and there was a bitter taste at the back of his tongue.

He looked down at his drink and sneered. "This piss is giving me a headache," he muttered, discarding the rest. "I don't know how you can drink so much of it."

Jack giggled. "The trick, you see, is to get it down quickly before the taste can catch up with you." He grinned stupidly and Hector saw that he was now nearly through the second tankard.

This time Barbossa yanked it away. "Stop, ye fool! What good are ya to me drunk!?"

"Shh, darlin', don't fuss." Jack slurred, leaning close to Hector and pressing a finger to his lips. "You'll draw attention."

Barbossa stared back at him, seeing that Jack's eyes were glassy, and hooded. He had known Sparrow long enough to know the man could handle probably more than his fair share of drink and still manage all his tasks aboard the ship with relative efficiency. So it struck him odd that now, after only two drinks, that Jack seemed almost completely inebriated.

He glanced down at the pints in front of him and a dreadful, sinking feeling filled his

stomach. He clutched Jack's hand under the table and leaned a bit closer. "We've been had. Say nothing, follow me."

His partner nodded faintly, though it was unclear if he understood and followed his lead as they stood slowly up from the table and made their way towards the back door of the tavern, where they had seen their guide disappear to. Hector was sure to be seen by the bar maid, and the bar keep as well, knowing they were watching.

But instead of proceeding out the back door, he pulled Jack sharply aside, ducking into a narrow entrance that lead back into the kitchens. Jack stumbled beside him, his good humor gone, clutching Hector for support.

"Oy, what's happening...Hector slow down, the room is spinning."

"We've been drugged," Barbossa muttered in return, doing his best to support the wilting man, while his own hands and knees began to quake and the persistent throb at the back of his head was moving steadily forward. "We've got to get out of here before they catch us."

"Before who catches...?" Jack's voice trailed off and he dropped to his knees on the floor. Hector cursed and tried to pull him up, catching the attention of the cook, who looked up from his place at the boiling kettle at these unwanted guest.

"What are you lot doing back here?! Trying to sneak off without paying eh?" He pulled a butcher knife from the counter top and started towards them, and Hector drew his pistol and pointed it back at him with one hand while the other tried to keep hold of Jack. The flintlock rattled in his unsteady fingers, but he didn't lower it.

"Stay back! I won't warn ya again!"

The colors and the lights of the room were beginning to bleed together, making it difficult to see. Hector felt sick, and all he wanted was to close his eyes and drown out the noise and light and *sleep* but in this company that was basically a death sentence. Shouldering Jack's now unconscious figure, he edged his way towards the back of the kitchen, where there was a separate door. The cook watched him, trying to move closer, but the pirate fired off a warning shot that went wild and took off part of his ear.

The man shouted, holding his bleeding head, and Hector took the opening and ran for it. Jack was slung across his shoulders as he sprinted outside into the sand and tall grass, making at once for an embankment, which he slid down. Behind him he could hear cursing and shouting, and soon the crack of gunfire could be heard close behind.

Barbossa ran, but he was growing more sluggish with every step and Jack felt so heavy against him. He needed someplace to hide, anywhere at all. He didn't know what these people wanted with them or why, but he knew that the outcome was going to be treacherous. He wasn't going to let that happen, not to himself, and not to Jack. He *had* to escape.

He staggered along a trail that lead behind several more rows of houses, where the shadows were deep and the voices were harder to hear. They were at the edge of the jungle, and Barbossa, feeling the last of his strength fading, knew he was facing an impossible choice. If he remained in the town, he would surely be caught. If he ventured alone into the dark, there was no telling what would happen.

Taking a firmer hold on Jack, he darted under the swaying palms, through the thick ferns and heavy under brush, farther and farther away from the lights. He could hear voices shouting at



each other in the dark, no doubt someone had found his trail. But they would have a much harder time of it now, with no sand beneath his feet, only rocks and thick spongy earth and grass.

His vision was swimming, and finally his knees would hold him no more. He fell with a groan, and let Jack slump to the ground beside him, undisturbed by the movement. He lay there, heaving for air and trying to battle against the narcotic that was overtaking his senses and loosing bitterly.

Hector turned his face towards Jacks, reached and took his hand, laying close to him. Sparrow was alive, he was still breathing. He needed to keep him that way. "Jack," he mumbled, but the sound was too weak to be heard, much less to rouse the unconscious man beside him.

There, in the blackness, with nothing but the distant sound of the ocean and the chorus of nocturnal insects and creatures softly slithering through the palm forest, Barbossa thought he heard a new sound.

Footsteps, soft and purposeful, moving their way towards him.

He tried to move, tried to reach for his weapon but he couldn't do more than twitch. His limbs were so heavy and there was just no more fight in him. He squeezed Jack's hand again, and stared blindly into the dark. Something emerged ahead of him, coming from deeper in the woods rather than from the town beyond. He could only make out shadows now as his eyes closed on their own, but he thought he heard a voice he'd once heard before.

Then there was nothing.

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## Chapter 6

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Jack woke later, feeling as though his head had been replaced with a bag of broken rocks. He was lying on his side on an old rug, a blanket tossed over him. Squinting about, for his eyes would not yet open all the way, he could make out the vague outlines of a small room, with a bed tucked in the corner, a wardrobe and dresser of some sort, a table and chairs. Light was coming in through the slats in the windows and beneath the door, signaling that it was morning once more.

He tried to push himself up, and it was a slow and painful process. “Hector...?” he mumbled, his tongue feeling like mush in his mouth. Somewhere outside he could hear the birds singing and tweeting, making an early morning ruckus. With his head pounding, he wished could shoot them all. He got to his feet with some difficulty and felt himself over as he stood propped against the wall for support. His weapons were surprisingly still in-tact, as was his money. This struck Jack as very odd, but he certainly wasn’t going to argue.

Now that his eyes were beginning to adjust to the light, he could make out more details of the room. From the look of the plaster and stone walls, and the hodge-podge of expensive looking furnishings, as well as the small, narrow windows that were cut deep into the brick, Jack began to gather that he was someplace much different than the ramshackle shanty town.

He moved towards the door of the small room, and found it locked from the outside. Sighing, he jiggled the heavy iron knob for a bit, kicked it for good measure, and then cast about for something to pick the lock with.

He felt sweat beading his neck, and not just due to the rising heat in the room, but for the fact that he had no idea yet where Hector was, or if he was hurt, or even alive. A hard knot formed in his stomach and he set his jaw, forgoing trying to pick the lock and instead moving to the door hinges, grabbing the fire place poker and using it to pry the pins out.

After several moments of relentless assault, the door creaked and groaned and started to fall inward. Jack caught it before the resulting crash could raise alarm and settled it to the ground, cautiously poking his head out into the hall.

“Well, no guard at the door. That’s always positive,” he mumbled to himself as he crept out into the darkened stone corridor, unsure which way to head first. To his left was a set of stairs that vanished upward, and to his right was a bend in the corridor, from which a greater amount of light was coming from. Jack listened, keeping still, sure he wasn’t the only one around. “Now, if I were a feisty ginger haired pirate, where would someone keep me prisoner?”

He decided at last to head towards the steps, finding that they were steep and lead up towards a tower room. He passed another thin window and paused to peer out, realizing he was in fact inside the old fort that sat on an embankment above the rest of the port.

The storm had blown over and the sky and sea were both crystal clear and blue again, but despite the fair weather, Jack noted the lack of ships in the harbor. Jack thought again to the warnings and the story he had heard last night about the Navy bearing down upon the port, and

story or no, obviously the natives of Nassau believed they were in peril.

Jack hastened his steps, finding that the stairs came to a dead end at another door way. Glancing behind him, he crouched and peered through the key hole. At first he couldn't make out much, just another room much like he had come from. But when he shifted, he could see a body on the bed that was shoved under the window. His eyes widened when he saw Hector's slack face and figure, and he barely withheld a gasp when he saw a shadow move across him.

Someone else was in the room as well. Jack twisted, trying to see better, and saw a tall, long-haired figure step closer to the inert man on the bed, sword in hand, which he seemed to be sharpening. Jack pulled away from the door, reached hurriedly into his belt and pulled out his gun, firing against the locked latch.

The door shuddered and smoked, the hunk of wood around the knob blown to splinters and warped iron. As it groaned on its hinges, Jack kicked it wide and rushed inside, taking aim at the man who stood over Barbossa.

"Stand aside!" he warned, looking harshly at the man before him, daring him to move.

The swordsman turned curiously, not looking particularly startled by the violent intrusion, but rather mildly confused. He was taller than Jack by a full head, with broad shoulders and long blond hair that hung down his back in greasy, unwashed braids. He had an equally long face and a pointed nose, and cheekbones that were high and made the hollows of his cheeks look gaunt.

"That's quite an entrance." He said simply, offering Jack a dry smile. "I suppose I should be impressed with your gall at the very least."

Jack didn't retort, waving the gun at him to signal him to step aside. The man took a step back, allowing Jack to move towards the bed where Hector laid inert. Keeping his gun trained on the swordsman, he grasped Hector's limp wrist and felt for a pulse. Luckily it was going strong.

"You, over there. Put the sword down and kick it here."

The man laughed softly. "You feel you're in a position to give orders do you? Presumptuous whelp, aren't you?"

Jack fired past his shoulder, narrowly missing the man's neck by less than an inch. "Presumptuous perhaps. Dangerous, however, you can be sure of, mate. Now, put the sword down and step over there. Or the next one goes right between your eyes, savvy?"

Their captor shrugged and sheathed his weapon, setting it upon the stone floor and nudged it towards Sparrow, who kicked it under the bed. "Someone will have heard that shot, you know. You don't have long before someone comes to investigate."

"Shut up." Jack hissed. He bent over Hector, turning the man towards him, shaking his shoulder in an attempt to rouse him from his stupor. "Hector, come on mate, I need you to wake up."

Hector didn't however, he remained perfectly still on the bed and Jack felt the knot in his stomach tighten. He got an arm under the man and pulled him, but Barbossa only sagged against him, head falling against Jack's shoulder. "Come on, luv, come out of it. I'm so sorry I got us into this bloody mess..."

"You can coax him all you like, he's not going to budge before the drug's run its course.

To be honest, I'm rather surprised you're as spry as you are. Millie tells me you nearly had twice the dose,"

"I've a strong stomach. Shall we find out if you do?" Jack hissed, aiming the pistol at the man's guts. "Why'd you bring us here. Who the fuck are you?"

"My name is Charles Vane. This is my island and my port."

"Never heard of you," Jack muttered.

The older man laughed softly, "Well, that's a pity. And what you of, boy? Some runaway or cast off from one of the neighboring islands? Another mullatto mutt escaping life on the fringe of society?"

"I'm still asking the questions, mate." Jack reminded him sharply, not caring to be referred to as a half breed, though technically he was. "Tell me why we're here."

"My people said you were asking about Calico Jack."

"You know 'im?"

"Aye, I knew 'im well. Scurvy dog was once a quarter master of mine, till he mutinied and went off on his own. Ungrateful cur." He looked to Barbossa then. "Your friend bears his ring. Now, why might that be, I wonder?"

"There you go speaking out of turn again, not very good following directions, eh? No wonder you were mutinied." Jack muttered. He could hear the sound of distant movement and knew they would soon be discovered. With Hector still unconscious, and only one shot left in his pistol, he didn't like his odds.

"Fine," Vane said then from his corner, "Since it seems you are holding all the cards, what are your demands?"

Jack frowned, feeling as if perhaps Vane didn't have the same appreciation of the situation as he did. But he wasn't about to point that out to him. "Me and my friend go free."

"Of course,"

"And since you claim to be lord of this port, you'll see your way clear with escorting us to the other side of the wall."

"And why do you want to go there?"

"That's our business."

"If you want to go to the other side of the wall, then I must conclude that you are spies for the Navy. And I'm afraid I can't let you leave this place alive."

Jack sneered, "Would a spy of the bloody navy sail with Captain Teague? Better still, would said pirates wear the rings of not one, but two pirate lords? Cause if you think so, mate, yer daft and maybe its best if I put you out of yer misery before your men get word of it and mutiny you again."

Vane seem to consider this, studying Jack a bit more closely now. "And where be your Captain now?"

“You don’t really want to find out, do you?” Jack sneered. “Although I could certainly make an introduction. I’m sure he’d be pleased to know why it is you’ve let a once safe harbor for our kind fall to ruin and in-fighting, eh?”

Vane’s blue eyes sharpened but he nodded. “Alright, boy. You and your friend will go unharmed. But after I tell you why it is the other side of the wall is dangerous, you may not be apt to venture there.”

“We’ll decide that. Do we have an accord?”

“Aye.” Vane nodded. Jack put his gun back in his belt and shook the man’s outstretched hand, hard and fast. The deal was sealed.

No sooner had they released each other than several men appeared in the broken doorway, armed and looking warily at the group inside.

“Alright there, Captain?” the man at the forefront, short, baldly and portly asked, looking perplexedly at Jack.

“It’s alright Tully. The boy and I were just having a friendly chat.” Vane answered. He looked to Jack again, “I never did get your name.”

“Jack Sparrow,” he answered, “You might have heard of me?”

“Afraid not.”

Jack sighed. Against him Barbossa groaned softly and shifted his head on Jack’s shoulder. The dark-haired pirate turned all his attention to his mate then, putting both arms around him.

“Tully, why don’t you bring some provisions for the lads. Looks like they’re going to be our guests.”

“Aye, Captain.”

The men turned and shuffled back down the stairs from where they came and Vane moved after them as well. “I have matters to attend of my own, but it won’t take long. Mind you stay here, and my men will bring you whatever you need. Try and escape, and our deal is off, Jack Sparrow.”

Jack nodded, eager to be rid of the man as he kept his eyes on Barbossa. “Come on, luv, come back to me. You’re alright, just open your eyes.”

He saw a pale sliver of blue under Hector’s lashes and cuddled him closer. “Look at me, luv. I’ve got you, not to worry. You’ve nothing to fear with ol’ Jack around.”

Barbossa’s hand came up and slapped him as he pushed back from the smaller man, sinking back into the bed.

“Ow! What was that for!?”

“I’m not sure,” Hector slurred, still gathering his wits. “But I know whatever it is, it’s your fault I feel like this.”

“Technically it’s that cheeky bar maid’s fault, as she’s the one who slipped us the

narcotics.”

Hector put a hand to his forehead, wincing around at the brightness of the room. “Where the bloody hell are we?”

“In the fort, apparently. Courtesy of one Captain Charles Vane, apparent leader of this god-forsaken rabble of cut throats. You know ‘im?”

Hector winced, shaking his head slowly. “Doesn’t come to mind.” He mumbled. The man named Tully returned with a pitcher of water and two tin cups in hand, and close behind him came a woman with a plate of cheese and bread, which were sat on the table near the fireplace and chair.

Barbossa tensed, but Jack kept him still. “It’s alright,” he insisted quietly. “Moving too quickly isn’t going to do you any favors just now.”

The portly, bald pirate filled one of the cups and presented it to Jack. “Have ‘im drink plenty of this, it’ll help with the headache. Not much will help otherwise.” He looked at the pair of them, “I don’t know what you two boys think you’re going to accomplish by coming here. I just hope it doesn’t get you killed. These are dark times, and if you had a brain between the two of you, you’d let Vane escort ya back to yer ship and be done with it all. No fabled treasure is worth risking yer necks.”

Jack and Hector eyed each other curiously but said nothing. “We’ll take our chances,” Jack nodded then, thanking the man for the drink and the advice.

Tully grunted at them, shaking his head and quietly left the room, along with the woman who turned and gave them a worried look before shutting the remains of the door behind her.

Jack waited until he heard their footsteps fade away before helping Barbossa sit up again, presenting him the water. The other man hesitated, clearly unsure if he should trust another mysterious drink presented to him.

Jack took a sip of it himself to be sure it was safe and then nodded, “Go on.”

His mate gulped it down greedily and let himself rest against Jack again for a moment, earning a contented smile from the younger man. “Better, luv?”

“I suppose I be grateful you managed to keep your wits. I was afraid...” his cheeks turned faintly pink and Jack brushed his lips against his lovingly.

“You were worried about me, eh?”

“Well who wouldn’t be? Ye can hardly take two steps without blindly trotting off into danger. What will you do when I’m not there to save ye?”

“Well, I suppose I’ll just have to stay very close then.” He kissed him again and Hector didn’t resist. He was indeed relieved to find that no harm had come to Jack, and that is quest wasn’t yet lost, even if it had taken an unexpected turn. “How long have I been out?”

“It’s nearly noon, so we’ve lost hours at best, but not days. Always a positive. Especially as it seems that neither the Navy nor Teague has arrived to gut us yet.” He shivered a bit at the thought, but then forced himself to refocus. “So...as it stands, we find ourselves cordial guests of Captain Vane, who agreed to take us beyond the wall, thanks to my brilliant negotiating.

“Ah, I’m sad to have missed that,” Hector mumbled, fetching more water for himself. His knees were still a bit unsteady, but he managed.

“Vane and Rackham appear to have been old ship mates. Though I’m not certain as to how he feels about ‘im these days. He recognized your ring, which I think is the foremost reason we’re not strung up like turkeys, and seemed very nervous about the idea of being visited by any of the pirate lords.”

“Ye think he knows were Calico is?”

“My guess would be that said Captain is somewhere beyond the wall, as the sailor on our way in so helpfully suggested, and that Vane may or may not be feuding with him. Then of course, there’s the treasure.”

Hector had a foggy memory of that and looked more closely at his mate. “And what of it?”

“Well, that pudgy fellow seemed to think that we must be after it, and that’s why we came here. Which, I believe. But doesn’t it seem strange to you, that if there’s treasure to be had here on the island, that all these pirates would be heading the other way?”

“Treasure or no, the Navy is no small foe to be reckoned with. Whatever the tales, clearly the threat is more tangible than this fabled gold.”

“That perhaps, depends on the *contents* of said treasure.” Jack replied, stroking his short black goatee thoughtfully. “We need to find out more.”

“I don’t care about the treasure, Jack, that’s not why I’m here.”

Sparrow gawked. “Bite your tongue you don’t care about treasure! What sort of pirate are you!?”

“A sane one. All I want is to find Rackham. From there, we’ll decide the next course.”

Jack sighed, stood and stretched his hands above his head as he yawned. “Alright then, luv. Have it your way. We find Rackham and carry on from there. But, wouldn’t it be a nice homecoming present if we had something nice and shiny to present him, eh?”

“Jack...”

“Just a thought, luv. Just a thought.”

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## Chapter 7

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Vane appeared again a short time later, looking somewhat less congenial than he had when he'd left. "Apologizes for keeping you waiting, gents." He spoke upon reentering the tower room. He looked to be rather tense, a churning tide below a placid surface. But both young men detected the sharpness in his eyes and the tightness in the lines of his mouth.

He surveyed them both a moment before taking a seat in the chair near the fireplace, and turning his attentions to Barbossa. "I don't believe we've been formally introduced."

"Suppose we haven't," Hector retorted stiffly. "If you've an acquaintance with Calico Jack, ye may know who I am already."

"So the color of your hair is no coincidence then," Vane replied. He shook his head slightly, stroking his chin, "You're his bastard runt. I thought Ann had enough sense to give you up."

"Watch who you're calling a bastard, mate." Jack warned from his place against the wall.

Vane leered at him, but Hector waved Jack off.

"What's brought you here looking for Calico? Hoping for revenge?"

"The last time I saw either of my parents, the pirates of this island were raiding the naval town and the governor's house was in flames. Both took on serious injuries in the fray, all I want to know is if they are still alive and where I might find them."

"A noble and humble request, wouldn't you say, Captain? One worthy of your consideration I'd say." Jack quipped again.

"The uprising you speak of happened many years ago, boy. The Royal Navy has not controlled this port since then; we drove them from these waters and made them ours alone. Your parents had a hand in that, but now...well I'm afraid now, things are different." He looked out the window to the forest of palms that stretched across the reaching and rolling hills, and from this distance they could see the arching coast and faintly, in the distance, the line where the trees ended and the wall began.

"The Brethren have held our ground here for many seasons, but those who raided and took over the other side of New Providence found a wealth of spoils. At first, things continued on as they had and the wealth was evenly distributed among them. All would share in wealth, all would prosper and Nassau would only grow greater for it. Until last winter.

"A ship arrived in port, having recently plundered a Spanish treasure galleon bound for the colonies. Their holds were bursting with swag, but that wasn't the most interesting bit. In the captain's logs, there were neatly scrawled notes, detailing a hidden agenda made by the Spanish ship's captain. Apparently, the treasure the ship was carrying, was only a fourth of the loot



promised to be delivered. The rest, as it turns out, had been removed and stashed in various locations throughout the Caribbean, hidden away to protect it. The log contained maps, leading to each of three stops where the rest of the treasure had been dispersed. The total worth of the gold and jewels was said to be over a million Spanish dollars.”

Jack and Hector’s eyes went wide. Neither had even seen that much wealth in their entire lives, and the prospect that it was all in arms reach was a bit dizzying.

“And what became of the log and the maps?”

“Your guess is as good as anyone’s,” Vane replied. “Once word was out that the log contained the maps and the means to finding the rest of the treasure, the streets of Nassau ran red with pirate blood. Greed overwhelmed us and now...we are all that’s left.” He pointed to the line where the trees stopped. “The men who control what lies beyond that wall are hunting for that map. And they have no qualms about killing any who threaten their enterprise. They fear neither pirate nor privateer. Taking you there is nearly tantamount to signing your death warrant.”

“I heard tell Rackham is beyond that wall, among these rouge pirates. Be that true?”

Vane looked irritated, but nodded. “Aye. You’ll find him there.”

“Then you’ll be taking us.”

“You won’t like what you find there, boy. Heed my warning, take your friend and return to your Captain and your ship. The Royal Navy is bearing down on this island, and from what my spies tell me, they will arrive before dawn tomorrow if the winds remain fair. When they arrive, I doubt they will be apt to take prisoners.”

“We appreciate your concern, Captain Vane, but our welfare isn’t your concern. I care nothing for that treasure, I only want to find Rackham and Bonny. Speaking of which...I notice she has been suspiciously absent from your narrative, as well as her First Mate Mary Read. What of them do you know?”

“Little and nothing.”

Hector stood, “The sun is getting high Captain. We’d best be on our way.”

Vane didn’t budge, he looked at them with a deadly serious expression as if trying to decide what his next move should be.

“We have an agreement, Vane,” Jack reminded him sharply.

“Aye. We do.”

He stood and moved past them, ushering them both from the room and down the stairwell towards the lower halls. There were more people here, Vane’s crew from what the pair could guess. They eyed the passing pair with cold, suspicious glances as they followed the Captain through the corridors.

“Unfriendly lot,” Jack whispered. “Looks like they’d slit yer throat soon as look at ye.”

“I think you’re all too right about that.” His companion answered. “Keep a sharp eye. Don’t get distracted.”

Jack rolled his eyes, “You worry too much.”

They found themselves in the central courtyard of the fort then under the bright blistering heat of the Caribbean sun. Vane lead them towards the man they recognized as “Tully” and spoke to him quickly. “Give the lads a sink of water and whatever rations you can spare. I’m taking them up the trail, I need two men in escort as well.”

“You can’t be serious, sir,” the other man replied. “We should be hunkering in, shoring up the boats and getting ready to—“

“Are you questioning my orders, Mr. Tully?”

“No, Captain.” The other man sighed. He looked behind him and waved, and two other men from the huddled group came to join them, abandoning their tasks. “Bring machetes and plenty of powder and bullets. We’re going up the trail. There are to be no delays, I want us there and gone before sundown.”

“Aye, Captain.”

Vane turned to them and looked hard, folding his large, muscular arms. “This is your last chance to turn back, lads. What say you?”

“I say we’ve enough talking,” Hector grumbled, growing agitated with the constant resistance.

Vane didn’t look pleased with this answer, but neither did he look surprised. A few moments later the rest of their party returned with packs and long knives to cut their way through the overgrowth, and they made for the gates without another word.

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The jungle trail was more twisting and vague than Hector recalled, as time had weathered it, allowed more foliage to overtake it, and the winds and storms to obscure many of the markers that would otherwise guide them.

But Vane seemed to know the way without any of these, and Hector recalled what Jack and Mary had once said to him about the dangers of the trail and how it was kept secret by having no written route, only memorized by those who traversed it the most.

The walked mostly in silence, one man in front of the other, with Hector right behind Vane, Jack behind him, and their two escorts behind him. Jack cursed and muttered as he swatted at the large insects that seemed to plague them at every turn. Massive dragon flies, aggressive mosquitos and all manner of ants and beetles, seemed to brush or crawl against him, making him shudder. Sparrow was truly a child of the ocean, awkward on land and pining for the sureness of a ship to command. Water was an element he respected and understood, but the jungle and its wild twists and turns and many hidden dangers was an entirely different matter.

Barbossa couldn’t say that he didn’t ache for the sway of the deck beneath his feet, but his mind was preoccupied with other concerns. From what he could discern from Vane’s account, his father must have been one of the pirates that took over the English side of the island after the raid. But Vane had described this lot as blood thirsty, gold hungry and heedless of the Code. That didn’t sound like Calico Jack. Yet, Hector had to ask himself, how much he really knew about the man? They had met so briefly, spoken so little before Hector was put on that ill-fated ship and sent across the ocean. Maybe Rackham wasn’t the man he thought he was.

They had already come five miles through the thicket of palms and were going steadily further and further up hill, making their footing difficult and unsure. Behind him Jack slid and Hector reached back reflexively and caught him before he could roll down the hill.

“I’ve got you!”

He tugged the man back close to him and the smaller man nodded gratefully. “Something snagged me foot,” he muttered, using his sword to push away the large fanned leaves of the bushes. In doing so, he quickly discovered the source of his fall.

Jack grimaced as the sight of a fly ridden dead body, which was bloody and mutilated, missing it’s hands and feet, shoved face down beneath the underbrush. Hector gripped the smaller man tighter, looking away from the mess in distaste as Vane and the others came to see what the commotion was.

“Poor blighter certainly met a bad end,” Jack shivered, sticking out his tongue and resisting the urge to gag as Vane moved closer to inspect the body. “Though I don’t think it was because he got lost.”

“I don’t recognize him,” Vane sighed, standing up again and dusting off his hands. “He isn’t one of ours.”

“Then whose is he?” Jack asked, scratching his head.

“Have you forgotten so quickly, Jack? Captain Vane seems to think there’s an “us” and a ‘them’. But I think he’s forgotten there’s already a “them” we must contend with. And that be the Royal Navies of England and Spain.”

“Do not speak on politics you understand nothing of.” The Captain sneered, but Hector wouldn’t back down. He didn’t like Vane, not at all. He was up to something, but for the moment it remained unseen.

“What offense do you take, Captain? Was it not you who claimed to abhor the slaughter and bloodshed between our own kind? Or maybe you just don’t like being on the losing side, that it?”

Vane’s fingers curled over the hilt of his saber. “You speak out of turn young Rackham.”

Hector scoffed. “The name’s Barbossa. And I suppose it’s a bad habit of mine, not being able to hold my tongue in the presence of obvious bullshit.”

“Hector, I’m not going to lie, I have never been more attracted to you than I am in this moment.” Sparrow said at his shoulder, ready to pull his own weapon and defend Barbossa should Vane make a move.

Hector smirked at the corner of his mouth, “Focus, Jack.”

Vane looked mildly disturbed by this exchange, but it passed quickly. “I’m sorry gentlemen, I believe this is where our adventure comes to an end.”

“Maybe for you,” Hector said, flashing his sword. The two swung at each other and their blades met with a great clash of metal that shook the formerly quiet air.

Jack surged forward, swiftly engaging the two escorts who proceeded to defend their captain. They swung at Jack viciously with their machete blades, and Jack avoided them deftly,

returning their thrusts with deadly slashes of his own. He raked one man across the chest with his blade, and he went down with a bellow and spurt of blood.

The other came at him with more force, screaming and eyes bulging. Jack shrieked in return, throwing himself backward into a flip and then a summersault to avoid having his head sliced open like a melon.

Meanwhile Vane and Barbossa were engaged in mortal combat, driving each other back and forth along the trail, trying to disembowel one another.

“Did you really think I would believe a story like that—the bastard child of that opportunist Rackham and his wench shows up in my port—wanting nothing more than a bloody family reunion!?” he laughed bitterly as Hector swiped at him, managing to parry the thrust and force the younger man to stumble back.

Barbossa nearly fell but caught himself, swung into a spin and managed to stab Vane in the thigh. The man roared in pain, but didn’t stop advancing, catching Hector across the cheek with the point of his sword.

“Yer out of your mind, Vane!”

The man only cackled more at the exclamation, drawing Hector away from the trail further into the jungle where it was harder to defend himself in the uncertain terrain. “Not as much as you want me to believe. Where is it, Barbossa?! If you’re after Rackham then you’re after the map! Where has he hidden it! Tell me and I’ll let you live!”

He dove at Hector, who avoided caught his sword against his and kept it just inches from slicing through his guts. In a desperate move and fell back, kicking Vane hard in the groin and again in the face as he went down. The captain laid there winded and moaning, unable to get up right away as Jack came sprinting up behind him and gave him a hard kick to the head that put him out.

The tan skinned man was splattered with blood, his shirt ripped and hanging off his shoulder.

“Jack!”

“It’s alright, it’s not mine,” Sparrow shushed him, taking his hand and pulling him to his feet. “But we’d better hurry, I don’t want to be here when he wakes up from that headache.”

Barbossa nodded, took the other man’s hand and started off at a trot through the jungle again.

Neither knew where they were going, but now they could see where the greenery was thinning and the path was clearer, and about two miles yet in the distance, they could see the stone wall that divided the two sides of the island.

Fighting their way along the path, breathing hard and soaked with sweat, they could hear the approach of Vane and his remaining man following them.

“Okay, so this is not how I expected to die,” Jack panted as they sprinted along the loose dirt and gravel path, trying to keep as much room between them and Vane as they could. “But I suppose there are worse ways.”

“You might think differently if he catches us and tortures us!”

“Why would he do that?!”

“He thinks Calico has the map, and that I know how to get it!”

“Fuck! Well that does put a damper on things!”

Shots cracked behind them and a bullet bounced off the ground close to Jack’s foot. Barbossa turned and fired over his shoulder, pushing Sparrow ahead of him. The shot struck Vane’s other man right in the head and he went down with a thud.

Vane fired again and the bullet ripped through the loose fabric of Hector’s sleeve. Jack fired back this time and Vane was forced to drop off the path to avoid being hit.

The pair started running harder now, the wall in sight. But Vane was still hot on their trail, cursing and screaming at them. As they skittered around trees and rocks, trying to lose the enraged pirate and make themselves harder targets, Barbossa thought he spotted something lying upon the ground.

He caught Jack by the shirt tail and yanked him towards him, diverting from the path and heading out into the deep thick of the forest again.

“Hector, he’s getting closer, what are you doing!?”

“Good,” Barbossa cackled. Glancing over his shoulder he could see Vane closing in, and he made for the small clearing ahead of them that was covered with old dead leaves. He nudged Jack to the right, knocking him off course and sending him skidding into the dirt, where he briefly disappeared under a huge fern.

Then Hector did something else surprising as he turned about and came to a full stop. “Here I am ye fucker, come and claim me if you can!”

Vane screamed and dove at him, thrusting his sword forward. But no sooner had his feet hit the spot with the leaves, then there was a crack and a snap and Vane was suddenly catapulted upwards as a net sprung up around him and flung him up into the air. He screamed and struggled, but had lost his sword in the process and was now dangling from a rather awkward and uncomfortable position from his suspended net.

Jack sat up with a laugh, eyes wide and sparkling with mirth. “That was bloody genius!”

Hector smiled as well, though he was huffing and puffing for breath, hands shaking. After all, he hadn’t been certain the trap would even work, as it must have been laid down some time ago.

“This place is crawlin’ with traps like these, and worse I imagine. I’m sure Captain Vane knows that. He just got a little over excited.”

“I’ll kill you!”

“I’m sure you’ll try, Captain. Another day perhaps.” He turned and saw his prize was nearly at hand, as a shadow was cast over them from the high wall that stood before them. “But for now, I have some overdue business I must attend.”

“This isn’t over Barbossa!”

“Could’ve fooled me, mate.” Jack called back, just to vex him. The pair limped back towards the trail, hearing Vane struggled and curse them the whole way until eventually his voice faded under the din of chittering bugs and bird calls.

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The wall rose up in front of them, weathered, chipped and peppered by canon fire. Like the rest of Nassau, it appeared to have seen better days. By this time the sky was heavy and overcast, and the humidity was palpable, and Jack was sure as he squinted across the tree tops that he could see a curtain of rain falling out in the harbor. Another storm was blowing there way.

They followed it along until they came to a gate, which had been chained and padlocked several times over, though the chains were somewhat rusted now. Jack took a whack at them with his machete and after a few careful strikes the weathered iron gave way and they were able to yank the gates open.

They stepped through the archway, silent and watchful, expecting at any moment to be set upon by more sailors willing to gut them on the off-hand they might be threatening their stake in some fabled gold.

Instead, they were met with an eerie stillness. Unlike the port, there were no sounds of laughter or drinking, or even brawling. There were no voices at all, and as they passed the formerly lovely brick and plaster homes that had line the neat cobble stone streets of the town, they saw that most had been ransacked and abandoned.

Broken doors swung ominously back and forth on their busted hinges, faded and damaged shutters on windows flapped in the hot wind. But the only living thing they came upon was a cluster of old stray cats that skittered across their path and darted under weather fences and slithered under porch steps.

“If this is supposed to be a fortress where all the pirates with gold are cloistered together in a den of murderous thieves...I have to say I’m not very impressed.” Jack said, finally breaking the oppressive silence between them.

“The town looks like she’s been abandoned. Not a soul in sight.”

“Hiding perhaps?”

“Then they’re dreadfully good at it.” Barbossa nodded. As they came out onto the main roadway, which lead all the way up to the top of the high peek where the grandest estates stood from the harbor below.

There were ships in the port alright, a dozen or so of various size and origin. But even so, he still didn’t see much in the way of movement, though he was sure there must be men aboard tending to the vessels. He pulled Jack back behind the corner of a building, not wanting to give themselves away just yet.

He turned his eyes back towards the crest of the hill, and there he could see the ruins of Governor Rogers’s manner. The time he spent there flashed before his eyes, he remembered Ann’s portrait on the wall in his room, the scent of tobacco in Governor Roger’s study, his mountains of parchment. He remembered the smell of the first meal he had, served on gleaming silver. The

smell of warm bread, juicy meat, and wine. He remembered James Bonny beating him, shoving him into that mattress, pressed hard against him, raving. He remembered Ann, and the look on her face as James had threatened to slit his throat. Like he was something precious.

“Hector?”

He blinked, suddenly finding himself looking into Jack’s warm brown eyes, which were full of concern. “It’s alright. You’re alright.”

He didn’t understand what the man was talking about until Jack’s finger brushed over his cheek and wiped away the dampness there. He blinked away the rest of the tears that hadn’t shed themselves and kissed Jack’s palm, taking a breath to steady himself.

“Which way, mate?”

“The house first. If we find nothing there, we’ll head for the harbor.”

He nodded and they set off, staying off the main road and moving quietly as they could along the fringe of the rowhouses, doing their best to stay in the shadows and take advantage of the growing gloom that crept over them.

“I don’t like this,” Jack whispered, his usual devil-may-care grin gone, his tone quiet and tense. “Feels like a trap.”

“I’m inclined to agree, except there isn’t a soul who knows we’re coming, save Vane who’s still pissing and spitting in that net.”

As they drew closer, they could see the damage that had been left by the fire. The white plaster charred black around doors and windows that had the panes shattered from them. Blackened draperies waved in the breeze and the over grown grass of the front gardens shivered and bowed like waves on the sea. They stepped through the unbarred gate towards the front steps, passing the stagnant and crumbling fountain that stood in the middle of the cobblestones.

They both saw dark stains upon the white marble steps leading into the street from porch; stains that looked far more recent than much of the other damage.

“This was a mistake,” Barbossa muttered. “We never should have come here.”

“Wait, Hector, I see something.”

Jack had caught sight of something through the open door of the mansion, which opened into the wide foyer and then to a hall that led to the back of the house, where there was another open doorway. Jack had seen something pass through it.

The pair gripped their weapons and moved silently towards the threshold, Hector pausing on the steps to look seriously at his partner. “If this goes wrong, I want you to run for the harbor, take a ship and get out of here. Don’t worry about me.”

“I’m not leaving you behind for these vultures. We either leave together or not at all.”

“Are you an absolute fool?!” The redhead hissed, looking Jack hard in the eye. He could not, would not let this man throw his life away for him, a man he’d known such a short time. Jack had the world in front of him, a full life he could still live if he walked away now, washed his hands of Hector and all this madness.

“Love makes fools of us all, darling.”

Hector was stunned in silence, staring at Jack, realizing how deep the man had fallen.

“Jack,”

“Shh. I hear something.”

They peered through the darkness of the home before them, eyes searching the shadows. Perhaps the town was not entirely abandoned after all. Barbossa looked at the dark haired man beside him. “Listen to me, go around the side and meet in the back. Wait five minutes and if I don’t come out, please, *please*—“

“Come to your rescue? Of course mate!” Jack winked and kissed him sincerely.

“Go for a ship, do you understand me? If I lost you in there, if you get killed on my watch because of this stupidity I’ll never forgive myself. And neither will Teague.”

Jack nodded slowly and only when he seemed to understand did Hector pull away and make quietly towards the front door, waving Sparrow off. Jack dashed across the marble porch, past the high pillars and jumped down into the over grown shrubby and was gone.

Hector looked back into the darkness, held his breath, and moved forward.

The foyer was a place of ruin and death. Broken furniture and glass were scattered about the floor. There were bodies, at least six that he could count, lying in various states of decay about the room. He gaged on the potent smell of rotted flesh and covered his face with his hand, gripping his sword tighter with the other as he edged across the stained and scuffed floor.

The men scattered about him had died fighting it seemed. More pertinently, they seemed to have died fighting each other. There was a man on the steps that still had a sword stabbed through his chest, the blade pinning him to the floor. Others had died by bullets or seemed to have been bludgeoned to death with whatever items had been available.

Hector moved past them, trying not to look for very long, lest he be sick everywhere. The least decayed corpse had been dead no less than a week by his guess.

He crept further down the corridor, doing his best to be silent, pausing before passing doors, trying to hear even the smallest sound. But all he did hear was a low peel of thunder from far off and soft pitter patter of rain as the storm at last closed in on them.

It began as soft trickle, then quickly crescendo into a steady drumming and Hector struggled to steady his breath and calm the pounding of his own heart as he edged his way through the hall. More dead inside the dinning room. Less recently from the look of them, mummified and skeletal in their frozen positions around the table.

He kept onward, moving towards the light of the back doorway. Now that he was closer, he could indeed see something else moving, but not in a way he expected. He could see something weaving in and out from beyond the doorway, as though it were swaying or swinging in the wind.

A tree branch perhaps or perhaps a broken bit of wood dangling from the roof or eve of the house. He glanced back behind him, but there was nothing there. Woodes Roger’s once grand estate had become a tomb.

He wished Jack were there to steady him then. That he could reach over and grab his



hand. To know he wasn't alone. *That he didn't have to be alone anymore.*

Hector stepped into the doorway, letting the rain pelt him, without so much as blinking. The color drained from his face, and indeed he felt for a moment that his very heart might have stopped.

The object swaying in the wind, was not a branch or some teetering piece of housing. It was a body. A man, hardly recognizable for the state of his decay and his exposure to the elements and creatures, swung freely back and forth from a noose fixed to a high tree branch in the garden. While there was not much flesh left, he was still instantly recognizable by the coat he wore. A Calico pattern, made famous by the pirate who had taken it as his name sake. Jack Rackham.

Barbossa crumbled, his knees hitting the ground hard, unable to look away from the terrible image before him.

Rackham was dead. His father was dead. He had come all this way, *survived* so much, only to find this. Proof of his worst nightmares.

They hanged him and left him to swing instead of cutting him down, giving him a proper burial. Left him to be picked apart by birds and to shrivel in the sun. Had no one tried to stop this? Had no one tried to save him? Where were Ann and Mary? Dead too he supposed.

He cursed softly, then again more bitterly, hearing his voice crack and his throat burn as a sob—no—a *scream* crawled up it and he howled in rage through the rain, beating his fists against the ground, cursing god, pirates, gold and everything else he could think of. And most of all himself.

Eventually he grit his teeth and swallowed the rest of the fury that was inside him, damp and shaking, unable to lift himself. He heard soft footsteps coming towards him, assuming it was Jack.

Not surprisingly the other pirate hadn't followed orders.

"It was all for nothing," he mumbled hoarsely to the man who came to stand behind him. "All this time, all this way...I survived sea monsters, the green flash...I weathered every battle, every storm. I fought my way back here. For what? I'm such a fool, Jack."

The man behind him moved forward and Hector expected Jack's arms to wrap around him and hug him tight. Instead, a rope was drawn taught and fast across his neck, yanking him backward as it twisted and squeezed.

Barbossa let out a strangled yelp, grasping at the offending rope and find himself looking up into the eyes of Charles Vane, who grinned down at him with hellish delight. "What's the matter boy? Miss your daddy? Not to worry, you'll be with him soon."

Hector choked and squirmed, trying to keep the rope from crushing his throat, but it was a battle he was swiftly losing between the lack of air and the restriction of blood as Vane strangled him, dragging him across the floor, back into house.

He kicked and squirmed, until he eventually he made a last ditch effort and reached up, catching the man's cheek and eye under his nails. He dug in hard and scratched downward.

Vane howled as Hector felt blood coat his fingertips, but it did the trick. The man let go of the rope, allowing Barbossa to fall free upon the floor, gulping air and coughing hard. But Vane was quicker to recover than he was, though he was now only able to open one eye and little river of

blood ran down his face from the jagged scratches Barbossa had left in his flesh.

He drew a short sword from his belt and swung at Hector, catching him in an arch across the ribs and abdomen. Hector doubled over, wrapping one arm around himself as he felt the wound begin to dribble blood into his shirt.

Vane made to attack again, but this time Barbossa ducked, and the sword buried itself into the wood above his head instead. Hector kicked out viciously, striking the man in the kneecap, which made a popping sound and Vane went down with a scream of his own.

Hector reached into his belt, grabbed his gun and trained it on Vane's head, but the man shouted and raised his hands. "Don't shoot! I surrender!"

"Fuck you!" Barbossa spat back, but the truth was his hand was shaking so hard he couldn't hold the gun. It tumbled from his blood slick fingers and he laid there, rasping with pain, watching red bloom across his shirt like poppies in the summer time.

"I don't have the map, Vane..." he panted. "I never did. I never heard of the treasure before you told me...you've killed us both for nothing."

But Vane didn't look discouraged, the despite the obvious pain he was in as he attempted to pop his knee back into its socket. He began to laugh in fact, and Hector thought for sure he had gone mad.

"Not nothing."

Someone approached them then from one of the closed rooms, and Hector twisted, though his vision was fading. A man came to stand over him, looking down at him with a thin smile.

"My Red Serpent. What trouble have you gotten yourself into?"

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## Chapter 8

### Chapter Notes

\*I apologize in advance for what feels like a giant exposition dump

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Jack crept around the side of the house, ducking below windows to be sure he wasn't seen and moving steadily towards the back gardens and wide rear courtyard that was nestled between two separate buildings of smaller but equally elegant stature. As he moved, he strained to hear even the softest sound, for like Hector he was sure that they were not alone. The back garden was barred by a small stone wall with an iron-rod archway that appeared rusted shut. Through it, Jack could see the overgrown bramble of weeds and wildflowers that had taken over what was once a stately display of tropical blooms and roses.

He grasped the rusted old bars and gave them a tug, but they didn't budge under his power. He tried a little harder, and the metal creaked and moaned, but still didn't move. Sparrow cursed softly under his breath, knowing he couldn't cause too much noise, lest he draw attention to himself and bring whatever was hiding here down on his head.

Forgoing the gate, he decided instead to try climbing the wall, which really should have been simple enough. Sheathing his sword, he grabbed hold of one of the overgrown vines that were crawling there way over the wall and tried to use it as a rope to pull himself over. Almost predictably, it snapped under Jack's weight and he stumbled back with a curse.

Overhead, the rain had started, and Jack sighed, as now his task was going to be that much more difficult dealing with wet stone. Yet, the sound of it might help muffle his own, so he broke even. He made to try again, this time taking it a run and a leap. He grasped the wall and the vines for support and they held, allowing him to reach the top of the wall securely.

"Ha!" he grinned triumphantly, looking down into the garden, only to find that there was a very large thorn bush directly beneath the wall. "Mother fucker..."

He heard the distinct sound of voices then, hushed and serious. Quickly he ducked down and flattened himself against the side of the house, trying to make himself look small, glancing forward and back, only to realize that the sound was coming above his head.

Indeed, now that he was on top of the garden wall, he was perched beneath a window, one that had been left open a crack and did not appear to have been damaged by the fire like much of the others in the front of the house. Jack pressed himself against the wall and listened closely.

"...are you absolutely certain?"

"Aye, sir. Our spies saw them come ashore but yesterday, but they vanished. But now I have reports of a group of outsiders creeping through the port."

“Interesting. Find them, bring them to me.”

There was movement, and Jack shrunk himself down as whoever was inside came closer to the window and drew it shut to keep the rain out. The voices continued inside, but this time Jack could not make out their words through the glass. He became antsy, realizing now that these people were aware of their presence and likely to lay an ambush for them. He needed to get back to Hector and get out of there.

With a whimper of inevitability, he stood and took a great leap, trying to escape the brambles below him in the garden. He crashed to the ground and rolled, coming up in a splatter of wet grass, leaves and mud and bruised and scratched for his trouble. He was very grateful no one had saw his graceless endeavor, especially Barbossa.

Righting himself, he moved forward again, creeping along the hedges, and began to turn the corner and yelled in spite of himself. The sound was short and sharp, and he clapped a hand over his mouth to stifle the rest of it. His eyes widened at the sight of the body hanging from the large tree at the back of the garden, edged off by from the rest of the expansive courtyard.

He dropped down below the hedge and tried to collect himself, suddenly queasy. He'd seen men swing before in his life, of course. But they were all...*fresh* as it were. It wasn't often he saw a corpse left to wither like that. It was an awful sight. “Poor blighter...”

He was sure more than ever that they needed to leave this place before they ended up dangling themselves. He started up again when he heard another sound—a cry that chilled him to core. He recognized the sound in spite of its distortion. “Hector! *Hector!*”

He started at a run, feet splashing in the mud, but a hand reached out as if from nowhere, yanking him to the side, where he collided sharply with another body. A hand came over his face, palm smothered across his mouth while another pressed a gun hard against the underside of his jaw.

Wide-eyed he was yanked backwards, dragged across the ground and suddenly pulled downward. Jack struggled, but the hands would not release him and the awkward grip kept him from being able to reach his sword.

He was suddenly swallowed up by darkness, dragged backward down a flight of old stone steps and discarded harshly upon a cold stone floor. He yelped as he collided with it, and as he tried to turn over, he was met with a sharp boot kick to the head that put him down again.

Black spots blinked in and out of his vision and he felt the strong urge to close his eyes and go limp, but resisted. A boot came down on his shoulder and pressed him flat upon the floor, gun pointed at his head once more.

“My god...you're practically a child...”

Jack winced for the voice was strange to him, and as he tried to shake the dizziness from his vision, the visage of his assailant slowly came into view. It was a woman, long dark hair that fell over her shoulders in black curls, wearing a tattered dress, boots and a man's muddy frock coat. In the dark, he could not make out much else about her, except her wide, harrowed eyes.

Sparrow grumbled something unintelligible, attempting to right himself, but she hushed him sharply and turned to look up the short wooden stairs that lead to the open cellar doors. She pulled them shut, dousing them in blackness. For a few moments no one moved. Jack fumbled along the floor, reaching for his weapon when he heard the hiss of a match as a small golden light

was struck. The woman held the flickering light to a lantern, and held it out, looking to the younger man again, her gun still fixed on him.

“Quiet, boy. Or you’ll bring them down on us.”

“Who are you?”

“That is not your concern right now.”

“Really? It isn’t?” Jack gawked.

The woman lowered her gun a little, cocking her head as she looked at him. “Did I scramble your brains when I dragged you down here?”

“Hardly, but yours seem to be out of sorts if you think you can keep me here.” He stood and drew his own weapons. “Stand aside.”

“If you go out there, they’ll kill you.”

“They’ll have to catch me first. *Stand aside.*”

“I’ve not seen your face before. Did you come here on a ship? Where is it now?”

“You’re awfully inquisitive for a strange woman living in a cellar.” Jack noted. He nodded to her gun. “You’re not going to use that on me.”

“Why wouldn’t I?”

“Two reasons. One; if you wanted to shoot me, you’d have done it by now. Two; you don’t want to give your position away, and if you fire off that pistol now, you’ll be doing just that. So, it seems we have come to an impasse.”

She didn’t reply, but simply stood there gazing at him.

“So. Now I’m going to ask the questions, savvy?” He looked behind her at the door, hearing only the sound of pouring rain. But he hadn’t forgotten the cry that had jolted him to the bone a few moments before. “Who are you?”

“My name is Mary.”

“Alright, Mary. Who are you hiding from?”

She looked like she might flee then, for surely whatever had sent her cowering down here in the dark was something terrible. Instead she just shook her head at him, growing frustrated in her attempt to press upon him the direness of their situation. “The pirates who have taken this port...they’re out for blood. You aren’t safe here. No one is.”

Her knees were shaking and as Jack moved a bit closer, he saw that she was tattered, and muddy...and bloodied as well. Her skirts were stained with it, and Jack bit his lower lip nervously.

“Lass, I’m not a threat to you. I came here with my shipmate, who’s looking for Calico Jack and Ann Bonny. We were told they were here.”

The woman’s large eyes grew sad, and she shook her head slowly. “No, boy. Not anymore.” Her tone made Jack’s stomach feel hollow and he looked nervously again at the cellar door, thinking about the noise. He hadn’t heard another sound since then, and that was almost

worse.

“Listen to me, my friend is out there, right now, probably facing whatever it is you’re hiding from in here. I need to go help him. Let me pass, I’ll tell no one I saw you.”

“Why have you come here looking for Ann and Jack?”

“He’s...well, I suppose he’s home sick of sorts. I can’t really relate to the whole lost father thing. Frankly I wouldn’t mind losing mine for awhile.”

Now the woman moved closer, the gun lowered. Jack noticed she walked with a limp. “Your friend...you shouted a name up there when I snatched you. Was it...Hector?”

It was Jack’s turn to look uneasy. “Aye.”

She clapped her hands to her face and openly began to weep. “He’s alive! Oh God...oh Annie...Jack, our boy’s alive!”

Sparrow did not know what to make of this and looked on at her awkwardly, lowering his own weapon as well. Now that he thought about it, Hector had mentioned a woman named Mary...or was it a man named Mark? Jack couldn’t remember, but the woman seemed to fit the bill.

“Well he might not be much longer if you continue to keep me here!” he muttered. He tried moving past her, but she caught his arm and pulled him back.

“Wait! Wait...do not go that way. You’ll be seen too easily.”

She grabbed the lantern and lead him deeper into the cellar, past dusty casks of wine and ale, and a plethora of firearms and gunpowder kegs. “So who are these pirates you’re so fearful of, lass? Are you not pirate yourself?”

“Aye, and look where that has gotten me.” She hissed, still limping along in front of him. Jack saw that beneath the ruined hem of her skirt, her left leg was wrapped in dirty and stained bandages. The wound was old, but obviously not healed. “Know you of the map?” she asked.

“Only that every man and woman in this port is willing to gut each other to get it.” He muttered in reply.

“Indeed. While Jack controlled the port, he was able to manage the rumors surrounding the log page and the maps to the remaining Spanish treasure. He went on excursion, found what was hidden here in the port and tried to organize a fleet to seek out the rest. He wanted to send three separate ships to claim the remaining loot but...Vane came.”

“Ah yes. I’ve met said Captain. He nearly murdered us on the way here. He seemed to think Hector knew about the map and that he was trying to take it.”

“Vane’s mad with paranoia. When Jack wanted to separate the crews to avoid any one ship from just sailing off with the loot, forcing them to return here with their shares to be equally distributed, Vane saw it as a trick. He thought Calico would take the spoils from himself and the other hard earned captains and leave them with nothing. But Calico would never...” she paused, her voice cracking. “I’m sorry. That man was a fool from the start, but he was dear to me.”

“Was?” Jack asked softly. He thought of Hector and his heart broke. “He’s dead then.”

She nodded sadly. "Vane brought a mutiny against him. We tried to fight them off, tried to escape but...in the end they caught him anyway. Jack was too concerned about Ann to save his own skin."

"Then she's still alive?"

"Yes. Or at least, I suppose. I've not seen her in months, and we've become isolated here. Vane and his partners drive everyone from the island that they feel might be a threat."

"And how have you survived?"

"*Survived* is all I've done. I've been there fucking prisoner since they murdered Calico and the rest of the crew." Her face was lined and bitter, and Jack could see and hear the pain and hatred painted all over her pretty features. The woman had been through hell under this new regime. She wiped her eyes angrily on the back of her wrist and looked back at him.

"What's your name, boy? What are you to my Hector?"

"I'm Jack Sparrow. And your Hector is now...*my* Hector, I suppose." He blushed faintly. But the woman didn't seem taken aback by this admission, in fact she just smiled softly, tucking her hair back behind her head, tying it out of the way with a bit of twine. "Takes after his mother more than he realizes I suppose."

They came at last to another set of stairs that led up to a trap door that Jack guessed must lead up into the house. They lingered underneath it, listening for sounds of commotion from above. Faintly, they could hear the din of voices and footsteps. The previously abandoned house had suddenly become alive with activity.

"How long have you been hiding down here?" Sparrow whispered to her.

"Not long. Quiet," she whispered, pushing up on the door to allow only a small crack of light to appear around its edge. In doing so they could hear the sounds a bit clearer; people talking quickly and quietly with one another and the swift coming and going of footsteps. Though the cellar smelled of damp earth and dust, the house above them had the odd heavy scent of cologne, stale drinks and a sort of hot, musty smell that sometimes collected in closed off rooms with lots of sunlight but little circulation.

Perched behind Mary's shoulder, Jack could not make out the conversations that were being held just out of his sight, and the anxiety of not knowing where Hector was or whether or not he was in danger was making him ever more impatient.

"I'll go up," he whispered to the woman. "You stay here, when I—"

"You think I'm going to let you walk straight into that pack of wolves?" she hissed at him, lowering the door again. "As soon as you're seen you'll either be killed or taken prisoner and *then* killed. If they have caught Hector, they'll take him to Vane's partners."

"And what then? Do we stand down here cowering like rats while they torture him for information he doesn't have?" Jack barked, temper rising.

Read looked like she might slap him for a minute, but restrained herself. "If you want to help him, you're going to have to listen to me. You know nothing of this place, or the dangers it holds. Hector is safe while he is useful to them."

Jack did his best to calm himself and take her words to heart. "How was it you escaped?"

“I broke my chains and slipped past the men guarding me while they were in a drunken stupor.” She sat upon the stairs, looking clearly disheveled and unwell, trying to collect her thoughts and think of a plan.

Sparrow had sympathy for her then, but it didn’t quell his worry or frustration. “Alright. Clearly you’re not in any shape to help me fight off however many murderous halfwits are up there. You said they would take him to Vane’s partners; where are they?”

“This is the great house we’re under now, but the estate is much larger. Vane and his partner reside now in the west wing, beyond the center court yard. They’ll take him there to try to learn what he knows.”

Jack nodded, bending close to her to look her in the eye. “Can you take me there?”

She hesitated for only a second, but then nodded resolutely.

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Barbossa began to revive, senselessness giving away into a fog of pain. Agony radiated from his middle and he felt the immediate instinct to curl in on himself, press his hands tight to it and try to stem the pain. In addition to the burning, cutting throb, he felt something sharp, pricking and pulling at him, making the whole thing much worse. He tried to sit forward, but a hand pressed itself against his chest and kept him flat.

“Be still. I’m not finished.”

Barbossa laid there, confused. The voice was a soft command, steel wrapped in silk. He knew it well, but the idea of it here and now just seemed so utterly impossible. The sharp, pulling pain he realized was a needle being pulled through his flesh as his wound was being stitched.

He opened his eyes and looked down at himself, seeing blood smeared across his skin and a wide slice that arched across his ribs and stomach slowly being pulled closed. He looked at the hands at work, the long artful fingers and the olive colored flesh, quick and faultless in their work. The pain made him twitch again and he seized the man’s wrist without thinking, needing to stop the constant assault on his already damaged and sensitive nerves.

The man beside him turned his face towards him. Sao had not changed much in the short month since Barbossa had last laid eyes on him. Ironically their last meeting had been under similar circumstances; with Hector bleeding and Sao holding the source of his torment.

The man had let his beard grow a bit more, now it hung in a neat patch under his chin, tied off in a small tail with a bit of leather. His mustache was longer, and a bit sharper than before, and he shorn more of his hair off, leaving only one place at the top of his head where it was gathered in a long, tight ponytail. If it were loose, it would have fallen neatly down either side of his skull and touched his shoulders.

Sao halted his movements, giving the man a short reprieve, and smiled gently at him. Hector had not seen that expression on the other man’s face in ages. “I know it is painful, but you will endure. I’m not going to let you die. Lie still, I will get you something for the pain.”

“Why are you here?” Hector rasped, sweat beading his skin, shaking in an effort to



control himself and keep from wailing. The wound was deep, and he had lost much blood already. “You can’t be here...”

“There are many things in this world which seem impossible,” Sao replied with a hint of mirth in his voice. “But I do not feel this is one of them. Be still.”

Hector tried to crane his neck to see what the man was doing, or make sense even of where he was. The room did not look familiar, it had long windows and lavish draperies, but everything felt dark and somewhat stifling. The air was smothered with a sickly sweet smell of incense and flowers or herbs. They made him feel nauseous and dizzy.

The Malaysian man returned after a moment, holding a steaming wooden bowl in his hand, full of hot water and a floating bog of leaves and crushed herbs. “Breathe this in for a bit. It will relax you.”

Hector tried to knock it out of his hand, but Sao caught his wrist. “Let go!” he demanded, then groaned and shuddered in spite of himself, feeling more blood spill out of the remaining open bit of wound.

“I am trying to help you, if you will let me. Suffer if you wish, but I must continue with my work or you *will* die. Do you understand?” His voice was hard, but not cruel. Hector relented too weak to fight anymore and desperate for some relief.

Sao nodded and set the bowl close to him and picked up his needle, cleaning it on a damp bit of cloth next to the wash bowl and went to work again.

Hector screamed, but held himself in place, hands knotted in the sheets and blankets under him, growling and snarling as he attempted to ride out the pain, sweating hard. The steam from the bowl next to him started to do its work, his head beginning to feel like it was detached from his body as he became less and less aware of things. The pain remained, but it was muffled now.

The needle and thread passed through him one last time and Sao tied it off and cut it clean, wiping away the blood to make sure the suture was tight and neat, allowing no gaps or tears. “That shall suffice. You are lucky Vane’s aim was not better, or you would already be passed any help.”

“How...how did you find me?”

“It was you who found me,” Feng answered. “Where this is fate or coincidence, I am not sure.” He brushed his hand through Hector’s damp hair, pushing it out of his eyes. Barbossa tried to recoil from the touch, but failed. “But it appears to me that the tides of fate have brought you back to me for a purpose.”

His fingers brushed the white scar below Barbossa’s eye and his features began softer, sadder. “This is not what I wanted for you, Hector. Look where your stubbornness and pride have lead you.”

Barbossa reached up then, snatched the dark obsidian bead that hung around Sao’s neck—the symbol of his rank as a Pirate Lord of the South Seas—and dragged him down. “I’d kill you if I had the strength,” he hissed.

Sao Feng only smiled. “Would you, my love?”

“You’re no love of mine!” Hector yelled, despite the suffering it caused him. “You cast

me aside, threw me away like garbage, as soon as I *dared* to speak for myself...I was never your love. I was your possession.”

“That is not true.”

“Fuck off!” He tried to get up, and in doing so pitched to the side and nearly fell out of the bed. The other man caught him before he could and put him back in his place, holding him down hard and glaring at him with darkened, almond shaped eyes.

“It was *you* who betrayed *me* first, Barbossa. You who went against my wishes, *my* command. You made me look *weak*!”

Hector said nothing. He couldn’t have if he wanted to now, there was just no more energy left in him. The world didn’t make sense anymore; his father was dead and now the man who had marooned him and left him to die in Tortuga had reappeared in his life...and where was Jack?

Sao misread his sudden expression of worry as one of contrition and the anger in his eyes faded like a passing cloud. “But, you do not know what you’re saying now. You need to sleep, recover. We will discuss all this then.”

He tried to make Hector comfortable, wrapping his wound in clean bandages and cleaning the sweat from his skin with a cold wet cloth. “And what of your man, Vane? I’m sure he’d like to finish me off...”

“You’re under my protection. Vane, nor anyone else will touch you.”

“Ah, but I’ve heard that before, Sao...” he was fading out, exhausted and overwhelmed.

Sao took his hand gently and admired the jade stone of his ring which still adorned Hector’s finger. “You claim to hate me, yet you still wear this. Do you remember what I promised when I gave it to you all those years ago?”

Hector didn’t answer, and Sao leaned forward and kissed his forehead softly. “No harm shall come to the bearer of this ring.”

He lingered there a moment, feeling Hector breath underneath him, relishing the closeness and when he leaned away he saw the man had passed out again. But it didn’t matter, truly it was for the best.

Sao Feng studied his former lover’s face in silence, unsure of his next course of action. Hector was more than just an unexpected arrival, after all. His very appearance here had already altered the plan dramatically.

There were heavy footsteps at the door, and he heard Vane’s thick breath as he scoffed at him. “Not dead yet, I see.”

Sao turned slowly towards his partner, eyes dark and forbidding. “Hold your tongue, lest I remove it from your head.”

Charles was limping, his knee bandaged and set where Barbossa had injured him. But he looked no less dangerous for this inconvenience. “Do you really believe that cozying up to him is going to get him to reveal where Calico hid his map?”

“Your impatience blinds you,” Sao sighed, taking the bloody rags and clothes and

gathering together, shoving them into Vane's hands to be disposed of. "This man sailed with me until only a few short months ago. Never once did he mention a map, nor anything having to do with the former Captain or the gold. You have nearly killed him for nothing."

"Sailed with you?" Charles quipped, dumping the bloody water and rags upon the floor in a heap, just to spite the other, younger pirate. "He told me that he was sailing with the Pirate Lord Captain Teague, with whom they arrived."

"They?"

"There was another one with him, a dark haired mutt, calls himself Sparrow." He sneered, realizing Jack must have gotten away unnoticed by the rest of the crew that were still gathered in the house. "He'll be close by. I'll have the men search the grounds."

"For what purpose, exactly? It is clear to me that the map is not here on this island. Rackham's dead, his ship and home ransacked, his crew searched and executed. Even torturing that whore of his hasn't brought you any closer to its. He must have sent the map off with the other woman; the red haired one. We should be focusing on finding *her*. Not lingering here and waiting for the Navy to arrive."

"I'm not afraid of the Navy, Feng. Are you?"

Sao drew his pike from the thick belt around his waist, thrust Vane up against the wall and rested the point of it at the hollow of his jaw. "I fear no living man who sails these seas. Singapore has the might of the dragon behind it, and it will not bow to any man. Least of all an English dog." He released Vane after a moment, replacing his weapon.

"Let the navy come. My ships and I will be long gone from here, doing what *you* should have done in the first place! Hunting down Ann Bonny."

"Leave now, and you forfeit your share of the gold." Vane snapped.

Feng laughed at him. "You think this little sum of gold will make me lose sleep? Have you forgotten that I control the ports of Singapore. My wealth, nor my worth, will be diminished by a few measly chests of Spanish gold."

"A few chests? No. But one hundred...perhaps." He glanced over Sao's shoulder at Hector's sleeping figure on the bed. "Is he worth it? This traitor who spoke out against you? Who never told you of his origins; who appears here and now with another pirate lord, searching for the very man who denied you command?"

"I dislike ease droppers, Vane."

"I'm sure you dislike liars more."

Sao said nothing, but Charles could see the new uncertainty in his eyes. "You are no fool, Sao. I know that well. We owe you a great debt in securing this port for us. But it will be for nothing if the British reclaim Nassau, and the map is lost."

The Malaysian lord paused then looked back at Barbossa. "Give me time with him. I will learn what he knows. But if he does not have the map, we depart from this port in search of Bonny."

"Agreed."

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## Chapter 9

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

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The cellar, as it turned out, was not just a dank, musty dug out where the elite stored their spirits and bottled the spoils of their vineyards. It was in fact, a doorway to an entire network of below ground tunnel work, that lead all over the estate, leading from the great house to both of the separate wings that flanked the large, cliffside property.

But it seemed that the pirates who had taken over the land, were not aware of their existence, or simply thought them unsafe and ignored them. Mary lead Jack down long stone tunnels, that now and again would break with daylight as a short stairwell or alcove was revealed. Through these the rain dripped down onto the stones and brick, echoing in the otherwise empty corridors and giving Jack an eerie shiver.

“What are all these for?” he asked.

The woman shrugged, “From where they lead, I would guess they were used by the servants and slaves. They must have wanted the comings and goings of their workers to be discrete.” She sounded rather disgusted as she said this.

“And we won’t be discovered?”

“Not if your quiet,” she hissed back at him. “One of the tunnels on the other side collapsed awhile back, some of the men were injured in the cave in. They haven’t bothered with them since, as there is not much coming and going that needs done. The great house is usually abandoned; they set guards there to stave off raids. The rest of the time, they’re in the west wing.”

They were sloping downward, the tunnel become steeper and steeper until it evened out and two sets of stairs opened before them, one continuing downward, the other heading up to what looked like a door and another cellar.

Jack glanced down the descending stairs, which were dark and damp and in the stillness he was sure he could hear the sound of crashing waves.

“That leads to the tunnels beneath the cliffs. There’s a secret harbor there. Come away now.”

“If there’s a secret harbor, than surely there’s a ship! You could—“

“I could *nothing*. There is a small fleet of Chinese Junks down there, and their Captain shares the rule of Nassau with Vane. Trying to escape that way alone is suicide.”

Jack found this very interesting, but before he could ask the woman anymore questions,

they were at the top of the stairs, testing the door. Inside was yet another dark, musty room, but there was also candle light and the much clearer sounds of movement and talking. Mary ushered the younger man hurriedly through the opening and scurried with him across the cask and gun filled room, pulling him beneath yet another set of stairs. The door above them opened, and there came a brighter glow of light, followed by raucous laughter and animated talking. Several pairs of feet thudded their way down the steps and came to the center of the room, looking over the shelves of bottles and trying to select one.

“Hurry up there! Vane’s in a mood and not feeling particularly patient.”

“Oh when is he?” the other voice scoffed back.

“Well I can’t say as I blame him, he had a right nasty scuffle with that ginger haired bastard. Those scratches are going to scar to be sure, I’ll be surprised if he doesn’t lose that eye.”

“Eh, the other blighter got the worst of it. Won’t survive the night I wager.”

Jack tensed, but Mary shook her head and squeezed his hand, begging for silence.

“That won’t please Captain Feng. Seemed to have taken a shine to that one.”

“Hurry up, Thomas! I’m not getting my head cracked because you’re taking too long with the wine!”

“Ah go on, I’m doing you a favor. Vane’s right picky about his spirits. Bring him the wrong bottle and he might very well brain you with it. Here we go...this one’s sixty years old. Should soften his mood a bit.”

They moved back towards the stairs again, hurriedly chasing one another up the steps. As soon as they had reached the top, the door shutting behind them, Read and Sparrow were clambering after them, Jack managing to jam the toe of his boot into the crack before it could shut fully.

The room before them seemed to be a kitchen; longer than it was wide with a large open fireplace, where a large kettle was boiling and several small chickens were roasting on a spit over the dying fire below them. Jack watched the other pirate shuffled off into other parts of the house and then stepped inside him, Mary at his flank.

The woman was quick to arm herself with a long carving knife, which she slipped into the folds of her ruined dress.

Jack nodded appreciatively. “Remind me never to cross you, lass.”

“Stop calling me that,” she chided him. She tapped his chin and squeezed his cheeks. “I’m old enough to be your mother.” They smiled at each other, and then tensed again when they heard voices returning towards the room.

Jack grabbed Read and shoved her to the floor, obscuring her presence beneath a large table. He ducked down next to her and looked at her seriously. “I have an idea,” he whispered hastily. “And you’re not going to like it.”

The men returning to the room were startled to find the previously empty room, contained not one but two surprised guests. A man stood there, wild black hair and ragged appearance, with one of the Captain’s women, arms drawn behind her back and his gun pressed against her chest.

“Oh, there you are!” Jack said with a breath of relief. “I caught this one trying to sneak off down the cellar. No idea how she got loose, but you might want to look into that before the captain’s find out. Give me a hand with her, will you?”

“Who the bloody fuck are you?” the first man, broad with a protruding forehead and green frock coat balked.

“Me? I’m Billy, you git! Don’t you remember? I came up from the other side of the harbor not but yesterday to give you lads a hand before the bloody navy arrives. You told me all about your sister! Don’t you remember?”

“I...I did?” The man named Thomas looked to his companion, a lanky, but hunched Scotsman for some sort of conformation on this, but he looked equally lost and simply shrugged.

“Aw lads, you remember! Although you were both pretty far in your drink by then, heh. But don’t worry, I won’t tell a soul!”

“Um...right. Well, that’s right decent of you. Billy, was it?”

“Aye!” Jack laughed, moving forward abruptly with Mary, “Now how’s about you show me where this one ought to be, eh?”

The Scotsman moved towards Read and grabbed her harshly by the arm, “I’ll take ‘er. Bitch gave me a nasty bite last time I gave ‘er a toss.”

Jack grabbed her back, looking more pointedly at the hunched man. “I said I’ll be escorting her, mate. She’s a bit of handful, but I have a way with ‘em. You just lead the way, savvy?”

Mary was starting to look panicked and Jack couldn’t blame her, as he began to get a broader picture of what the woman had endured while captive.

“Don’t tell me what to—“

Jack turned the gun on Thomas, glaring at him. “I said; lead the way.”

He knew it was an impulsive move that could cost him, but that didn’t derail his impulse. Rouge and scoundrel though he may be, there were lines even Jack wouldn’t cross, and he wasn’t willing to let others cross them either.

Luckily for him, Thomas seemed intimidated, or perhaps just nervous and apathetic on the matter. He clearly didn’t think Read important enough to get himself shot over. He relented, raising his hands.

“Easy, easy! Touchy lout you are...bring ‘er here, I’ll show you.”

“Much obliged,” Jack answered, a tad more cheerily than he had before. With Thomas in front, they followed him out of the kitchen and into the rest of the wing. It mirrored the great house in some ways, though this part of the estate appeared to have been more private. There was a foyers that lead from the veranda overlooking the courtyard and a large sweeping staircase that lead to an upper level. They were drawn past this into a smaller parlor where half a dozen men were scattered across couches, chairs and chaises, most in a drunken haze, smoking pipes of odd smelling herbs that made Jack dizzy and drowsy when he breathed it in.

Most of them leered at the pair as they passed and Jack did his best to look congenial and

at ease, lest any of them should realize he was not supposed to be there.

Thomas opened the French doors at the back of the room, and in doing so Jack heard the ruffling of skirts, nervous gasps and a flurry of quick, anxious movements. There were six or seven women inside the room, all in various states of undress. They backed away from Thomas as he stepped inside and ushered Jack and Mary in.

This time he took the woman from him, giving her a slap and a shove, sending her to the floor. Jack saw the woman reach for the knife in her skirts, all too ready to defend herself. But there were too many people around, and they were still unsure where Barbossa was. The dark haired youth stepped in front of her to cover her actions and looked to Thomas.

“Right then! No harm, no foul, savvy? I think the lass has learned her lesson at any rate. Let’s leave any punishments up to the Captains, yeah?”

Thomas fixed him with another perplexed look and then shook his head, pulling Jack out the room and shutting the door behind him, locking it tight. Sparrow tensed, for this was not part of the plan. Even if said plan was not yet fully formed.

“Speaking of Captains, where might I find said fearless leaders? I understand that Captain Vane had come under some trouble lately, and I might have some information on the blighters that have been vexing him.”

“Captain Vane ain’t taking visitors just now. Recovering from that row he had with Calico Jack’s bastard runt. But, if you think you can be of service, you can always take your chances with Captain Feng, if he has time. Last anyone knew he was trying to keep the blighter from bleeding to death. Can’t imagine why, must be useful for something.”

Jack held his expression of pleasantness tightly, though if Thomas had a more observant eye, he would have seen the new fear in his eyes. “And where might I--?”

Thomas rolled his yellowed, watery eyes. “Follow me.”

“You’re a pearl, mate.” Jack grinned putting his arm around him and patting him friendly. In doing so, his nimble fingers were able to lift the keys from the man’s pocket, drop it quietly behind them before sliding it under the door for Mary to take.

They made their way back through the parlor and to the large stairwell, but it was here that Thomas stopped. “Third door on the right, the one that leads to the master apartment. Mind you knock first, and for fuck’s sake, don’t stammer. Sao Feng hates having his time wasted.”

Jack paused. For some reason that name felt familiar to him, though just at the moment he couldn’t remember why. He nodded his thanks to Thomas, smirking to himself as he ascended the stairs, for he had also relieved the man of his addition shots, a dagger and small pocket pistol. He reached the upper hall, glancing at the windows, both behind and in front of him, that arched across the wall, letting the little bit of light that broke through the storming clouds seep into the gloomy estate. In front of him, the window revealed the short yard and descending cliff side that gave way to the ocean beyond. Far on the horizon, though it was uncertain through the silver veil of shimmering rain, he thought he saw the faint outlines of tall white sails...

But when he blinked again, he could see nothing. Still, it was a reminder that they didn’t have time to linger. Jack moved down the candle-lit hall, noting the ruined walls, stained carpets and half drunk bodies that littered there. For the pirates who seemingly had it all, they seemed very disaffected.



He came to the third room on the right, which was pair of wide double doors. A man stood in front of them, heavily armed, glaring at Jack.

“I’m here to speak with Captain Feng.” He explained.

The man in front of him didn’t budge and only blinked slowly. Jack admired the large dragon tattoo that was visible on the left side of his chest and extended down his arm.

Sparrow rocked on his heels and coughed quietly, “I, ahem, said I’m here to see the Captain. So...should I just...let myself in?” he reached towards the knobs, but the man grunted harshly and tapped the back of his hand sharply with the flat end of his sword.

Jack hissed and stepped back, looking at him in confusion and frustrated. “Oy! Mate, I understand that he doesn’t like to be bothered, but it’s of *importance*. And I wouldn’t want to be the sorry sod who denied the Captain critical information.”

The man squinted at him; “Zǒu kāi.”\*

Jack blinked. “Come again?”

“Zǒu kāi! Chuán zhǎng shì máng!”\*

The other pirate simply looked at him, head cocked, mouth opened, squinting in confusion as if the guard had suddenly grown two heads. “Oh you have to be fucking kidding me.” He sighed. “Dammit, Hector, this is exactly what I needed you for in the first place!”

“Nǐ xū yào xiàn zài jiù lí kāi.”\* He reached for Jack, and although Sparrow didn’t understand him, he certainly sensed the gesture meant that he was not welcomed.

“Wait, wait!” Jack gasped, ducking out of the man’s grasp. The Malaysian guard came after him, growing more agitated with Jack’s antics. He took a swipe at Sparrow with his hefty fists, and managed to miss, sending it crashing through the wall inside.

The younger pirate yelped in dismay, realizing that could have very easily been his head, and grabbed for the nearest non-lethal object to defend himself with. In this case, it was an ornate French vase that was on a pedestal that was surprisingly heavy. Jack turned and smashed the thing over the man’s head as he struggled to free his fist from the wall.

The blow did the trick and he slumped to the ground, thoroughly stunned, laying in a halo of shattered porcelain.

Sparrow stood there, catching his breath, blinking at the floor. He suddenly realized why the pot was so heavy...something had been inside it. A rather heavy rock in fact, but more interesting that this was that rock had something tied to it. Jack picked it up carefully and turned it over in his hand. It was a rolled bit of parchment, old and fragile. He unrolled it carefully trying to reach the words that had been hastily scrawled across it, and as he did, his eyes widened.

This was the very map that Vane and the others were seeking so desperately. It had been under their noses all along. Jack breathed softly, licking his lips, and hurriedly tucked the bit of parchment inside his shirt, glancing around again to make sure no one had noticed him or his little brawl.

But the other pirates who were lingering nearby all seemed too drunk or dazed to know or care what was going on. But Jack was sure there were others who were not so apathetic in the matter lurking close by.

He hurried again to the door, and tested the knobs. To his surprise they were unlocked. Inside was another large, lavish apartment, with couches, tables, shelves of books, a table that was scattered with charts and maps. He slipped inside, doing his best to make no noise at all.

Music played softly from another part of the apartment that he could not see, as there were at least two off-shooting rooms, one veiled by heavy curtains, the other behind another set of doors. Jack moved slowly across the empty parlor, passing the room obscured by the draped fabric. He could see a man there, surrounded by a few women who were offering him drinks and food, while he was speaking to someone Jack could not see.

Whatever they were speaking of, it sounded dubious. He crept away, managing to remain hidden and made instead for the double doors. He tried the knob again, but this time found it locked. He cursed quietly and looked around for something to pick it with, when he heard someone from the other room approach.

He rushed for a hiding place, the best he could find being to crawl behind a roll top desk that was pushed into the corner near beneath a window. From his hiding place, he listened as the soft sounds of sandal-clad feet made their way across the room to the door he had been trying to open. Jack recognized the man with the strange black hair that was pulled high and tight on the top of his head, wearing a large, open-laced tunic that showed much of his chest and broad vest that was cinched at the waist by broad sash and belt. The markings on the vest were distinctly Chinese, and the man himself looked to be from that region or similar.

He produced a key from inside his vest and unlocked the door, slipping inside quickly and giving Jack no chance to see what was beyond. He cursed quietly to himself, and started to crawl towards the door.

A sword blade abruptly but silently swept just below his throat, stopping his motion and making him freeze.

"I had no idea that Sparrows could crawl." Vane's quiet voice said with some amusement. "But I suppose that's what happens when you break their little wings." He slashed Jack's arm and made the man topple to the side, clutching the wound.

Vane was ready to kill him then, but Jack cried out; "Parlay!"

"That won't save you," he muttered. Reaching down and dragging him up so that Jack could better see the damage that Barbossa had done to his face. "You and your friend have much to answer for."

"If you kill me, you'll regret it for the rest of your life." Jack sputtered, trying to keep his head while the very real threat of imminent evisceration stared him in the eye.

"I highly doubt that." Vane muttered.

"Kill me and you lose the map for good."

Here Charles paused, then sneered. "What are you playing at, you arrogant little cock? I already know you don't have it. You're bluffing."

"Ah, but do you really want to be taking that risk? After all, you have me cornered with a knife at my belly and no means of escape. Even I'm not stupid enough to try to bluff my way out of that."

They stared at each other for a time, waiting for the other to blink, Jack's blood dripping

down his arm making tiny droplets of scarlet upon the Persian rug. Finally, Vane withdrew his sword, though not his hold on Sparrow.

“What is it that you want, boy?”

“Agree to parlay, and I will lay out my terms. And then you shall have your precious map and all its treasures.” He glanced back towards the door where Feng had disappeared. “Shouldn’t you ask your friend to join us? I mean he is your partner after all.”

Vane paused, then shook his head. “This will be between you and I for now.” He turned Jack hard and marched him back out of the apartment. Sparrow dug his heels in for a moment, trying to resist and turn back, sure Hector must be in there still somewhere, but Vane wouldn’t let him budge. Resisting now would only complicate things. And for the moment, Jack had leverage. He just hoped it would be enough to save, Mary, Hector and himself.

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When Hector woke up again, night had fallen, but the room he occupied was brighter than even before. There were candles laid out everywhere by the dozens, illuminating the large ornate bedroom. A cool breeze ghosted across his skin and he could smell the salt air of the ocean on it. It was reviving, reassuring, something of home calling him back from the edge of darkness.

He was stiff and the pain was still sharp, but not as raw and agonizing as before. He managed to pull himself up and rest on his elbows, trying to get a better idea of where he was. Everything that had come before felt a little like a hazy dream. He glanced across the bed and saw, drawn up to a table that had been pulled in front of the open balcony doors, was Sao, pouring over long piece of parchment and charts.

He looked up at him fondly. “Awake at last,” he smiled, putting down his ink brush and rising from his seat.

“So you weren’t a dream,” Barbossa muttered as the man came to stand by his bedside.

“Do you dream of me often?” the other purred, the curl of a smile creeping across his lips.

“Don’t flatter yourself.” Barbossa spat, pushing himself up further, though he winced and groaned in doing so. Sao attempted to support him and Hector pushed him away. “I don’t need yer help.”

He threw off his covers and supporting himself against the tall bedpost, did his best to stand. His legs wanted to buckle on him, and everything from his rib cage down throbbed with the strain of movement as his core muscles protested. But he refused to give into the pain around Sao, to appear weak or damaged. He wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of it.

“Stubborn to a fault,” Feng sighed. “I don’t know why I thought you would have changed.”

“Neither do I,” Barbossa spat in return. “Though let’s be honest with each other; ye never thought you’d see my face again in this world.”

To this, the man from Singapore said nothing, but turned back towards the table. “If you are thinking of escape, I would advise against it. Your wound will mostly likely re-open if you attempt more than a few steps.”

“So I’m your prisoner now.” Hector muttered. “Just like how we left off.”

The other man soured, “Still angry I see. It matters not. The past is gone, and what stands before us now is this; Vane believes you have something of value to him and myself, or that you know where it is hidden. I believe he’s mistaken.”

“Yer partners with that cut throat. I’m surprised, Sao. I thought this sort of thing was beneath you.”

“We all must make a living, Barbossa. This port was an opportunity that I couldn’t pass up, a chance to further my own agenda. As for Vane, you needn’t be concerned with him. You’re under my protection now.”

“I refuse yer ‘protection’. I refused *you*.” Hector spat back.

Sao sighed, “What choice do you think you have in this matter, my Red Serpent? You are gravely wounded, unable to fight. You are utterly alone in a den of wolves who seek devour you. *I am your only hope for survival. Show some gratitude.*”

Hector stared, then smiled, and then laughed. It pained him to do so, and he clutched his stomach, but still the sound rolled out of him, growing louder and harsher.

“Have you gone mad?”

“Nay! For the first time in my life I think I see things clearly,” Hector chuckled. “Oh Sao...gratitude...how did I ever fail to show you that? I followed you to the edge of the world, I remained at your side, even when you were wrong. *I sacrificed everything for you. It was never enough.*”

“Would have preferred then if I had let you drown that day I found you drifting at sea?” Feng growled in response, growing frustrated with Hector’s stubborn resistance. “You owe me your life, Barbossa. Never forget that.”

“I never have.”

The young pirate lord, fell silent, letting those words sink in. He’s face fell into a familiar frown and he drew himself over to the balcony doors to look outside into the dark. The rain had stopped now, and the moon was shining through the clouds on the water below. “My decision might have been...rash. It was a political move, not an emotional one.”

“Liar,” Hector said softly. “What you did to me was no matter of politics. You were angry. You wanted to punish me.”

Sao didn’t retort, and his silence was simply more confirmation that he knew what he had done was wrong.

“It is pointless, I suppose, to beg forgiveness.” Feng offered. Barbossa blinked, for Sao had never deigned himself to beg Barbossa for anything, at least not seriously. He was far too prideful a creature to ever stoop to that low. Not even for the man he claimed to love.

“Pointless, aye.” He nodded after a time, wrapping an arm around his aching middle again. His

eyes swept the room, looking for a way out. He thought again of Jack, hoping he was alright, hoping perhaps he'd gone for help as Hector had pleaded with him to. He needed Jack to be safe. He could not bear the thought of losing anyone else today.

Sao moved to a large vanity where there had been a tray laid out filled with food and a steaming pot of green tea. Sao plucked a shiny, green apple from its place among the bowl of fruit and presented it to Hector. "Green was your favorite, wasn't it?"

Barbossa stared at it, feeling his mouth water as he realized how long it had been since his last meal. He swiped it from Sao's outstretched palm and bit into it angrily, and the juice dribbled down his chin. Sao smiled and turned away again, pouring them both a cup of tea and then returning to his seat at the table, leaving the tray of food for Barbossa to pick through on his own.

"Where is your companion?"

Hector stilled for a moment, pulse suddenly racing in his ears. Vane must have told him about Jack. "Pardon?" he asked, feigning confusion. But Sao, of course, didn't buy it.

"Vane tells me there was another man with you when you entered this port. Who is he?"

"No one of consequence."

"I see. Then it shouldn't concern you if he is killed when he is inevitably discovered." When Hector didn't speak, he continued on, "Charles also told me that you arrived here on a ship captained by none other than the Keeper of The Code himself. A man you know to be my enemy. Tell me, is this coincidence or spite?"

"Bit of both I suppose," Hector replied, taking pleasure in the look of annoyance on Sao's face. "But ye should be more concerned with what Teague will have to say if you kill one of his crew and take the other prisoner. Now I haven't known him long, but I'm sure as to say he won't be pleased. And he's a brutal man when displeased."

"So am I."

"What you and Vane are doing here is against the Code and you know it. Pirates have enough troubles on our heads already than to be killing each other over gold that might not even be real. If ye were wise, you'd break ties with him, beg forgiveness from the Court and return to Singapore."

"I am no coward. I will not run from Teague, or any of the Court."

"Do you fear *me*, Sao?"

Hector was looking at him seriously, blue eyes dark and stormy. "Tell me truthfully now; did you have a hand in murdering Calico Jack?"

Sao returned his gaze coolly. "I had no idea that Rackham was your blood."

"Answer the question."

"No." Feng answered quietly, resolutely. Hector believed him.

Barbossa felt warm dampness under his fingers then and looked down, removing his palm from the secure place it rested around his bandaged torso to see fresh blots of red appearing

there. “Damn,”

“You must lie back down.” Sao was beside him suddenly, easing him back into the bed, though Hector tried to force him away, succeeding only in making the pain worse and forcing a groan out of him.

“When will you learn to stop fighting me?!” Sao barked then, pinning the man’s arms to the bed, looming over him, teeth bare in frustration and eyes bright menacing. Hector froze for a moment beneath him, looking up at him with a familiar dread.

Sao saw the way his shadow fell over him, the look of fear in Hector’s eyes. He sat back with a grunt, releasing him. Neither of the men spoke for a long moment, then Hector winced again and looked down to see that more blood was spilling across the bandage.

Sao cursed softly and undid the bindings, checking the wound. Luckily the sutures had not reopened, but Barbossa’s excessive movement had caused it to seep and gap a bit. Sao put his hand over the wound to help stem the blood flow. It hurt and Hector reflexively put his hand over his, breathing hard.

Sao’s dark almond eyes met his. “You need to trust me.”

Barbossa’s jaw was tight, lips in a hard line as he searched Sao’s eyes for some indication of treachery, some tell. But if it was there, then it was well concealed. Feng moved away from him to gather new bandages and when began to bind the wound again, Hector did not resist.

“Let me help you, Barbossa. Not because you are weak, but because I need you at my side again. You are right, I have lowered myself for these swine who surround us. I have let myself be blinded to what my true desires are.” He finished securing the wrappings and leaned over the other man again. “You and I were once the most feared men in all the South China Seas. Sail with me again, Hector. The Sleeping Dragon and The Red Serpent of Singapore will rise again and strike terror in the hearts of our enemies. Is this not what you have desired all along? To be as we once were?”

The man below him could not speak for the lump in his throat. Sao put his hands on either side of his face and closed over top of him, kissing him deeply. Hector whimpered against his lips, tears falling down his cheeks. He had craved that touch for so many long days. Craved how it was now, in this moment, the way had been in years past. Loving and reassuring. And had this been a few short weeks ago, he would have fallen back into those arms willingly, surrendering everything just to have a chance at what once.

But Hector was not naïve.

He sunk back further into the pillow, pulling away from Sao’s mouth. The man above him said nothing to this sudden departure, but did not seem to take offense to it. Instead he moved his mouth to the soft place below Hector’s ear and pressed another kiss there, then lower, moving down the taut column of his throat to the well of his collar bone, moving his hand across Hector’s chest.

“Sao, wait...don’t think you can just—“

Feng looked up at him again, eyes darker in the candle light, an expression of covetousness on his face that made Barbossa shiver and grip the sheets. He wanted to shove Sao away, remind him that he hadn’t forgiven him, that he *hated* him, would kill him as soon as he had the chance...

The man had moved downward, careful of his wounds, and settled between his legs. Barbossa's eyes widened and he reached down, slapping his palm against Sao's forehead, trying to keep him from dipping his head any further. "Wait just a damn minute—!"

Sao grinned. It was a smile of a tiger lying in wait, golden eyed and ready to pounce. "Relax, please. You need distraction from the pain, and I continue to beg forgiveness."

His pale skin went scarlet beneath his freckles as Sao pulled open the buttons of his breeches and exposed his bare skin, gripping him lightly to see if Hector was as sensitive as he remembered. The action earned a sharp intake of breath, followed by an attempt to wiggle away that was quickly stemmed by Sao's hand holding his hips steadily in place.

Barbossa shut his eyes and did his best to relax. Fighting Sao off was only going to cost him physically, and right now that was not something he could risk. He had to get out of here, he had to find Jack. But if Sao learned what Sparrow was to him...

Sao's lips and tongue swept over his throbbing cock, making him sigh and moan despite his efforts to be silent. Feng was an artful lover, aggressive and passionate, dominating but also generous. And he liked to watch Hector squirm.

Barbossa knew he couldn't let Sao catch on to Jack, or that Hector had formed a relationship with him, even if it was new and budding still. Most of all he could not let Sao learn that Jack was Teague's son. His anger would be terrible, but it would be that of a hurricane if that were discovered.

He drew his hand across the top of Sao's head, grabbed the length of black hair that was drawn back and undid the tie around it, letting it fall across the man's skull. It always fell flat and heavy, shining like spilled ink.

Sao sucked him hard, taking him deeper into his mouth while also stroking him. Hector felt that hot ache in his stomach and thighs again and he knew he wasn't going to last long at this intensity. He arched upward, despite the jolt of pain it caused. The pleasure was already intense enough to blot it out as he drew closer to orgasm. He twisted one hand in Sao's long black hair, and the other in the sheets, biting his lips.

This wasn't fair, Sao was taking advantage of him like always...

He didn't want to think about Sao. He didn't want it to be him making him feel this good anymore. He wanted Jack. He tried close his eyes and picture the other man with his dark tan skin, that wild, coarse black hair and that perpetual mischievous grin and those big brown eyes...

"Ahh—ah! Nnnnh!" The rush was hard and fast, and when it was over he fell back boneless against the mattress heaved for breath. Sao licked him clean, teasing his over sensitive skin and looking thoroughly pleased about the whole thing.

"It is a start at least," he purred, re-dressing the man and tucking him back into the bed. "Though I will give you much more, if you accept my offer. What say you, Hector? We could leave all this behind, you and I. You need only say so."

Barbossa looked at him under heavy lids, still trying to calm his breath. "Ye ask a bit much of a man. I can't rightly think straight just now, much less give you a clear answer. I need a night's sleep and a clear head. In the morning, I'll give ye yer answer."

Sao nodded, not looking troubled, but almost amused at the more teasing tone of

resistance. He kissed Hector's lips again. "As you wish." He sat up, smoothing out his clothing and returned to his desk, gathering several items. "I will take my work elsewhere, so that you are not disturbed by my tasks. But my men shall be close by should you need anything, and I will return in the hour. Rest well."

The redhead said nothing in reply and pretended to doze as the pirate lord gathered his things and departed from the bed chamber, leaving him alone. He waited until he could hear no sounds beyond the door, then sat up with some effort, kicked the blankets away and struggled to stand once more.

Each movement was grueling, but he endured it, grabbing some of the bedsheet and shredding it to make a thicker binding around his waist to help support his body and keep his wound from reopening.

He could only manage a few steps at time, pausing between each to steady and collect himself, but he made his way to the table, where Sao had discarded his weapons and clothing. Redressing himself entirely was going to take too much effort and time, he grabbed only what was necessary and then glanced at the table.

He wasn't sure what Feng had taken with him, but what he left behind looked like a map of surrounding Caribbean ports, with several X's through various names, along with a list of ship names and dates...Hector wasn't sure what it meant but it felt important. He rolled the map up and tucked it into the back of his belt of safe keeping.

His gun in hand, sword once more fixed to his belt, he hobbled his way towards the door. But as he reached for it, the knob turned.

Hector froze, certain he had been caught.

But it wasn't Sao who entered. Rather, it was a woman, wearing tattered and bloodied skirts, holding a weapon of her own and looking quite ready to use it as she pushed her way inside the door.

"Stay where you are--!" she warned, but the threat seemed to fizzle quickly as her fearsome expression quickly changed to stark surprise. But whatever shock she must have felt, Hector knew it must be mirrored back in his own expression.

"Mary Read."

She tossed her weapon aside and threw her arms around him, clapping him close to her, and Hector followed suit.

"You're alive! Thank the Saints...I thought we'd lost you forever."

"I...thought much the same." He admitted, voice muffled by his face being buried against her shoulder and neck. "Calico's dead."

"I know, luv. I know. I'm so sorry."

"Why did you send me away? I could have helped, I wanted to help!" He found himself nearly sobbing again as he shook her, angry and terrified and relieved all at once.

"Shh...it doesn't matter now, luv. Calico wanted to save you, and he did at least that much. You made him so proud. Oh Annie will be so glad to see you. Look at you, you've become a man of your own..." She looked at the binding around his stomach and seemed to come back



into the reality of the moment. “We have to hurry. Your little friend was trying to help, but he never came back, and I fear they’ve caught him.”

“Jack? You mean Jack Sparrow?”

“Aye, that’s the one. Chirpy little thing, funny of you to call him a Sparrow...”

He started towards the door again, pulling her with him. “We have to go. Where last did ye see him?”

“He left me with the key off the parlor with the other women Vane and Feng have taken in for their entertainment. I made sure the girls got out all right before I came after you, but your friend was busy bluffing his way through the ranks. Those skunks were just drunk enough to listen too. They should have taken him to Sao Feng.”

“Alas not. He’s been with me this whole time, least while I’ve been awake. We’ve got to find him.”

She looked at him sternly then, an expression Barbossa remembered all too well on her features. “We may not have time. They’ve been keeping me here for months now, trying to get the location of that map out of me and the navy’s—“ she looked past him then, out the balcony doors. Hector turned too and there, on the far horizon were white sails, heading straight towards the island under the cover of darkness.

“—right at our bloody doorstep.”

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## Chapter End Notes

Translation (sorry if they aren't exact for anyone who speaks traditional Chinese! I used google translate)

\*Go away

\*The Captain's busy

\*You're going to have to leave now

# Chapter 10

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

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Vane had taken Sparrow downstairs to another drawing room that contained an old piano, dusty chandeliers and volumes and volumes of books. He shoved the man down in a chair at one end of a table, and he took a seat at the other.

“Got anything to eat? I’m starving.” Jack quipped.

Vane didn’t look amused.

“Name your terms, Mr. Sparrow.”

Jack quickly grew serious. “You are to release Barbossa and myself, along with the woman you’ve held captive here called Mary Read. She will accompany us on the ship you’re going to give us, filled with stores and provisions. We will sail away from this port, and I, being the generous gentlemen that I am, will not inform Captain Teague nor any of the rest of the court of your doings here. If you make a move to harm us, or inhibit our escape, I’ll burn the map.”

“Yes, the map...let’s see it then.”

Jack waved his finger. “Ah, but why would I want to be doing that, Captain? Giving it all away for free? I may not be a lady of the evening, but I certainly know how to get what I want out of a man.” He grinned like the cat who’d eaten the canary, despite knowing Vane could shoot him at any moment. “Free Mary Read, and bring Barbossa here to me. I understand that there was a scuffle, and you’ve harmed him.”

Jack pulled the parchment out of his shirt and held it close to the open flame of the candle between them. “Be quick about it. This parchment is old...it might just go up in ash while you’re sitting there making up your mind.”

Vane jolted forward to grab it, but Jack snatched it away. “Hector, and the lady. NOW.”

The older, blonde haired pirate relented finally, and Jack expected him to look even more thoroughly vexed than he had before. Instead he chuckled softly and shook his head, staring at the younger man in the pale candlelight. “Impressive little blighter you are, Sparrow. Where do you get the gall, I wonder?”

“Suppose some things just come natural.” Jack shrugged. He took the parchment, took a dagger from his belt, and laid the paper out upon the table. Vane moved closer, but Jack waved him back. Carefully, Jack cut a long slice of the paper away.

Vane’s eyes boggled. “What are you doing!!?”

“Hush,” Jack barked. He took the smaller piece of parchment and shoved it towards the

man, who caught it anxiously and looked it over. Jack had cut off a small section of the coordinates that had been laid out to find each of the remaining treasure hoards. This one by his guess, lay somewhere in one of their Jamaican ports. He looked carefully at the words, at the writing and the paper...it was all consistent with the other pieces they had found regarding the treasure.

“A show of good faith, aye? More than you’ve shown us. Now, bring me my mates and mind you don’t molest them any more in the process of doing so. Or I’ll make you regret it.”

Vane seemed satisfied with this and tucked the piece away in his coat. “Very well, Jack Sparrow. I will free you and your friends and you shall have your ship. But I’ll be having the rest of that map before you set foot upon deck, or the deal is off.”

“Agreed.”

They shook hands, and Vane pulled away quickly moving towards the door, “Sit tight, and don’t do anything stupid.”

He had no sooner open the French doors to the hall as he said this, only to find both Barbossa and Read staring back at him with weapons in hand. Vane was so surprised that for a moment he could not react at all and simply stood there gawking.

“Boo.” Hector grinned before Mary lurched forward and clouted the man in the head with the hilt of her gun and sent him to the floor in a heap.

“Hector!”

“Jack?”

The smaller man was across the room before Hector could make a move of his own, rushing him and throwing his arms around him. “You’re not dead?” he gasped, all smiles and eyes a bit over bright with relief.

Barbossa chuckled softly and laid his forehead against his. “No, m’luv. Not dead.” He pulled him in and kissed him warmly before drawing back, and removing the jade dragon ring from his finger, which he then placed on Jack’s thumb, the only one wide enough to bare it.

Sparrow blinked up at him in surprise at the gesture, not fully understanding but Hector just kissed him again before sighing; “I think I’ve had quite enough of this little adventure. How about you?”

The shorter man nodded in agreement, but his humor was lost when he saw that Hector was having trouble standing on his own, and that he appeared to have taken a rather serious wound. He put his hand lightly on the binding around his lover’s waist and his relief wilted into worry. His eyes turned to Mary then, “Clever girl, you found the key alright then?”

“And you two as well,” she answered, moving to bind Vane’s hands but Jack bent to stop her.

“No-no! Don’t truss him up, we need him! I just made a deal with the blighter to get us off the island, ship and everything!”

“Did you?”

Hector’s eyes widened at the sound of the new voice and he reflexively grabbed Jack’s

wrist and tugged the man close behind him as he turned to face Sao.

The pirate lord's face was a dangerous mask of veiled rage, holding his sword at the ready. "I'm afraid to inform you that Captain Vane failed to discuss this little arrangement with me, and thus it is useless."

"Who the fuck are you?" Jack snapped, but Hector kept him firmly behind him.

The corner beneath Sao Feng's eyes visibly twitched at this crass interruption and he leered hard and bitterly at Sparrow. "Who am I?" he retorted. "Pirate Lord of the South China Sea, The Sleeping Dragon...and the man who is going to end your life."

"Rather a lot of titles, 'innit?" Jack quipped.

Sao started forward, but Hector was quick to raise his own weapon and block his advance. "Not another step!"

Feng turned his eyes to him then, looking perhaps even more frightening. "I had forgotten there was a reason they named you a *snake*," he hissed.

"I'm leaving here, Sao. There's nothing you can do about it."

"Killing you would be a start."

Jack slid under Hector's arm, putting himself between the two men, much to Barbossa's dismay, and pressed his gun to Feng's forehead, forcing him back. "Over my dead body."

"You needn't tempt me," Sao Feng replied. He noted the protective way the pair stood, the worry in Hector's eyes now that Jack was in front of him, exposed and vulnerable despite being armed. "Who are you, boy?"

"He's no one," Hector said quickly, but Jack shushed him.

"Jack Sparrow, son of Pirate Lord and Keeper of the Code, Captain Teague, of the Brethren Court! *That's* who I am. So you'd better ask yourself, mate, do you *really* want to be standing here, openly threatening to murder the son of a Pirate Lord?"

Sao's eyes widened further, and as Hector expected, his rage began to boil over. "You... you trade me for this *mutt* of a bastard pirate! The son of the man who ruined my father's life! This is what you choose?!"

"Yer father ruined his own damn life, and I'm through letting you ruin mine!" Barbossa barked back.

Sao made to attack, Jack fired, but the pirate lord had already knocked his hand away, sending the shot upwards towards the ceiling and causing it to create a hole in the plaster, which then loosened the chandelier and brought it crashing down on the table behind them.

Barbossa was forced to fall back as Jack and Mary dueled Sao, who proved to be more than a match for both pirates, despite their expert swordsmanship. It was then that Vane caught Barbossa's foot and brought him to the floor with a crash.

Hector screamed as the fall jolted his injury and rendered him momentarily helpless. Both Jack and Sao turned at the cry, and when Feng realized Jack was just as concerned as he was, he advanced at him even harder.

“I’ll have your head!”

“You aren’t the first to try, mate!” Jack called back, grabbing one of the chairs and swinging it into Sao, forcing him backwards, though he quickly sliced it to splinters.

Mary grappled with Vane as he attempted to pin Hector down, the woman beating on the other man viciously, biting and punching him. Vane bellowed at the assault and managed to throw her off his back, grabbing her by the throat and squeezing hard. “Stupid bitch, I’ve had enough of you!”

Barbossa grabbed him from behind then, dagger at the man’s throat. “Let her go or I’ll bleed ye!” he raved, eyes wild. He was not going to lose Mary, not now, not like this and certainly not at the hands of this man.

“Feng, stop this madness!” Vane rasped, despite how hard Barbossa had the knife pressed to his throat, already drawing a thin line of blood. “The brat has the map! Let them go and the treasure’s ours!”

“Fuck you and fuck the treasure! I want blood!” Sao bellowed. He swiped at Jack, catching him across the thigh and tearing the fabric of his pants. But the wound was glancing at best and Sparrow didn’t lose a step.

“Ye want blood? Ye can have it!”

Sao advanced on him, ready to drive his blade home into the man’s chest. Jack spun clear of the blade, grabbed Feng’s wrist and yanked him forward off balance and punched him hard, squarely between the eyes.

Sao toppled, blood spurting from his nose and fumbled for his weapon.

Vane released Mary and Barbossa shoved him to the ground as well, just as Jack came back and grabbed him under the arm, pulling him up. “Come on! We have to go!”

Hector stumbled along beside him, with Mary looping her arm around his other side, the pair attempted to carry the injured man away from the brawl and escape, but they were quickly confronted by the remaining members of Vane and Feng’s crews. The men fell upon them, but the trio were surprisingly apt to counter the attack, slashing them back with swords and firing into them, slowly clearing their way from room to room.

There was a distant roar then, like the sound of a drum or...a canon. At first the sound was largely ignored, but it came again, louder this time. This drew the attention of the pirates, who gave pause in their may-lay as another sound joined this one, growing in strength and volume. Outside there came the sound of musket fire and men shouting in alarm, feet thundering along the previously empty cobblestone streets.

The British Navy had arrived. While the flag ship approached from the west, another, smaller vessel had approached from the south and taken the port by surprise, it’s armed gunmen charging through the street, engaging with whatever pirate they saw.

“The Navy!”

“Every man for himself!” Jack shouted, inciting instant panic among the men, who scrambled to either confront the rushing red coats, or turn and flee before they could be caught. Catching Hector, Jack and Mary became their very last priority.

But though they were no longer being advanced on directly, they were far from out of danger, as the ensuing chaos threatened to have them cut down or trampled as the troops lay siege to the house, opening fire through windows and doors, as the pirates inside tried to defend their positions or look for escape.

Musket balls peppered the walls behind them as they ran, windows were broke out and shattered as men attempted to climb inside, usually only to be brutally set upon by the pirates inside. It was turning into a massacre.

Mary gave Barbossa over to Jack, "Take him to the tunnels, go down to the boats. Don't wait for me." She instructed.

"Mary no!"

The woman grabbed Hector and kissed his cheeks and held him tight and fast for a second. "I love you. We all love you. So go; live."

"Mary!"

Jack nodded to the woman, grit his teeth and shouldered Hector more fully and took off at a run as the woman cleared the way for their escape.

"No! NO go back! We can't leave her!"

"I'm sorry, luv." Jack said, gritting his teeth as he carried the other man. "I'm so sorry."

He wrenched himself out of Jack's hands, fell but stood again, grabbing the wall for support as he fumbled back towards the brawl. "Damn you, I'll go back myself!"

"Hector!"

Barbossa pulled one of the guns from his belt, cocked it and fired at a pair of men that had beset the woman, driving her back into a corner. The bullet went through one man's shoulder and struck the other in the chest and they both went down. He fired again, caught an officer in the side, and again, allowing Mary to maneuver her way slowly back towards him.

"You're going to run out of bullets before you reach the tunnels!"

"I don't care!"

Jack was beside him again, firing off shots of his own. "Looks like we're in this together, mates! No going back! Keep firing, I've got our behind if you've got the front!"

"AYE!"

On they went, rushing through the house, battling through bedlam. Sao's men were particularly violent in their attempts, one lighting the fuse on a small bomb and rolling it towards them.

Hector saw it before it could reach them, deflected it with a punt from his weapon and sent it skirting back towards the owners as they made their way into the kitchen.

"Hit the deck!"

The door way exploded in hail of debris and smoke, bringing part of the wall crumbling down.

Coughing on the dust, the trio scrambled up again and made for the cellar door. Barbossa was unable to manage the cellar stairs at all, so Jack carried him on his back as they rushed back towards the darkened tunnel door.

Mary was the first to reach it and wrenched it open, pausing to look back at the two young men, who were panting and somewhat drained from the fight. "Stay here," she instructed gently, as the door above them was latched and barred now. "I'll go down and make sure the way is clear, and come back for you."

"Be careful," Hector begged.

She nodded and looked to Jack, "Look after him for me."

Sparrow nodded as he eased Hector down to allow him to rest while the woman vanished down the other stairwell into the tunnels beyond.

"You alright?" Jack asked, finally able to catch his breath and take stock of the situation.

"Never better," Hector laughed hoarsely. His features were ashen, despite the exertion, and Jack could see blood dripping down his leg onto the floor below them. He looked hastily at the bandage as saw that the wound had begun to seep through even the thicker binding.

"We need to get you to a doctor."

"I'll be fine. Just listen would ye? There's something I need to say, just in case I—"

A movement behind them caught his eye and made him draw Jack hard against him and draw his sword.

Sao Feng stepped from the shadows, guns in hand. "Yes, please do go on Hector. I'm sure the boy is *dying* to hear what you have to say next."

He took aim at the place squarely between Sparrow's shoulder blades, ready to fire, but Barbossa wrapped himself fully around Jack. "NO! You kill him, you kill me too!"

"Move away! Don't be stupid! This mutt is not worth your life!"

"That and more, by your own words, Sao! Look at his hand."

The pirate lord blinked in confusion, then glanced at Jack's left hand, which bore the jade dragon ring upon it.

"'No harm shall come to the bearer of this ring'," Hector quoted him, glaring hard back at his former lover. "Remember?"

Jack didn't understand fully what was happening, only that they were cornered, Hector was bleeding everywhere and he was very much afraid for both their lives. Meanwhile Barbossa and Sao Feng seemed locked in a silent war with each other. Jack glanced back at him through Hector's embrace, and was somewhat shocked at the broken expression on the other man's face. Could such a small gesture really have such an impact?

Above them, canon fire rumbled, men bellowed in the dark and dust shook itself free from the ceiling, scattering itself across them. The navy was upon them now, and their only chance to escape arrest and subsequent death was to flee the island and take to the sea again.

“Go,” Hector said then hurriedly, looking to Sao, not Jack. “Go, now! Before they take ye!”

Feng shifted nervously for a moment as two more heavy blasts thundered above them. He began to inch back towards the tunnels where Read had vanished before. “This isn’t over, Barbossa.” He warned.

“Aye, I know it isn’t.”

Giving one last threatening look to Sparrow, the Pirate Lord of Singapore turned and fled down the stairwell, as Jack struggled to get Hector on his feet again. But this time Barbossa could not even stand on his own.

“No, no, not now! Not now, come on luv, just lean on me, I’ve got you. We have to get out of here!”

“I can’t, Jack, I’m sorry...” He was so cold now, and utterly out of energy. “Leave me, I’m finished.”

“Not yet you aren’t.” He managed to lift Hector enough to carry him and rushed the door, hearing more canon fire the deeper they descended into the tunnels.

Jack was taking the stone steps two at a time, carried the by momentum of adrenaline and dread, trying to keep Hector alive and trying to escape. He skidded to a halt at the bottom of the tunnel steps, surprised to find himself looking out at an underground dock, where one or two boats still lingered. Others had already taken to water, and were at full sail, fleeing the approaching war galleon that was sitting just off shore, firing its guns at the fleeing pirates.

Jack made for a small, fast looking ship, thundering down the damp wood of the dock with Hector clutched against him just as Mary reappeared upon the ship’s deck. “Boys! Hurry!”

She reached out and helped them aboard, easing Hector onto the deck as Jack knelt beside him. “Stay with him, keep him talking, I’ll get us underway!”

Jack was only half listening to her, eyes fixed on Hector, clutching his hand in his, while the other kept pressure on his wound, trying to stop the bleeding. “Don’t you die on me, Barbossa. Don’t you dare. I’ll never forgive you, I swear I won’t.” He looked down at the ring on his thumb. “Why’d you do that for me?”

“Haven’t ye figured that out, Sparrow?” the man below him mumbled with a thin smile.

Jack leaned over him and kissed him.

The boat was moving, drifting on the water as Mary got the sails up, and the current steadily pulled them into the open sea. She looked back nervously at the two men on the deck, not ready to watch another person she loved die.

“Hold on, lads!”

She pulled the sails taught and as they traveled out of the mouth of the cavern, which was obscured from view on one side by the cliff side, allowing it to remain hidden, the wind caught them and pulled them fully into the fray.

Canon and gun fire was all around them, sea water spraying everywhere, men screaming and shouting at one another. The naval vessel was taking on heavy fire from the Chinese ships,



who were much smaller but also much faster and easier to maneuver.

They circled around the galleon, staying so close to the other, larger ship that it was unable to fire on them properly. Men fired down from the deck with muskets and pistols, but they were doing little but picking each other off here and there.

They swept along the ship's starboard side, narrowly dodging two cannon balls, and gunfire that peppered the sides of the little boat. Jack threw himself over Barbossa to keep him protected, while Mary controlled the helm.

"Jack! I need yer help!"

Sparrow reluctantly rose, grabbing the nearest long-range weapon, crouched at the rail and opened fire on the looming ship as it attempted to sink them. He took out several large chunks of wood from her bow, and earned return fire from the sailors still aboard, though they missed the speeding boat by a long shot.

They moved further away from the British, only to be caught between the other escaping pirates. Mary gripped the helm hard, dug her heels into the deck and guided them through the other drifting boats, who were all trying to escape the advancing menace that continued to fire on them from above. The crossfire was deadly, and twice a bullet came much too close to her. She felt one rip across her shin and she winced, but didn't lose her grip as she steered them deftly around the scattered ships, weaving in and out of the fleet, despite the way the wind pulled and the guns tore their sails.

The smaller boats began to break away, some taking on water as the galleon blew them to pieces, their crews flailing about the water as they swam towards the others. This made maneuvering slightly easier, until they realized they had come perfectly in range of the cannons.

Another barrage thundered through the air, smoke and fire briefly illuminating the grey mist around them. Several shots hit the water around them, causing large sprays that rocked the waves beneath them and doused them with water. Another sunk a small ship on their port side, flipping the small vessel onto its side in the water.

"Can't this thing go any faster!" Jack barked, tugging at the lines, but the sails were already at full canvas, and the waves were choppy beneath them.

There was another thunder of guns then, but these sounded distinctly different, and as Jack stared, he was certain the galleon had not fired off again. He whipped around and stared, wide eyed and breathless. He knew the sound of those guns. He'd heard them ever since he was an infant.

Teague's ship was sailing up the coast from the south, her canvas full, guns forward, ready to defend as she cut through the grey and green surf like a hot knife. The ships before The Misty Lady peeled away allowing her to draw closer to the galleon, turning slowly, creating a wall between her and the smaller fleeing ships as she fired six of her starboard guns straight into the British ship.

Jack Sparrow crowed in relief, waving frantically at the ship looming above them as they sped towards her. "There she is! Our saving grace! We're going to make it now! Mary, head right for her, we'll slide behind and climb aboard! We're going to make it!" His exuberance paled however, when he looked back at Barbossa, who was still upon the deck.

He dropped the lines and rushed beside him again, putting his head in his lap and trying

to rouse him. "Hector! Hector, luv, please wake up. Look at me, darlin'! You're gonna be alright now, we're safe! Hector...?"

He didn't respond and Jack gathered him closer, face in his chest. "I love you too."

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The sun was barely peeking over the horizon, making the sky pale blue and faintly pink in the distance, but already the relief of the cool evening before was passing as the temperature rose. Jack watched it from his place in the doorway of the little shack he occupied on the beach, feeling the morning breeze roll off the tide as it rolled slowly into shore.

It had been three days since the battle at Nassau, and they had retreated to another safe cove on a nearby cluster of islands that were still held safely in pirate control. Teague was still trying to clean up after the Nassau disaster, having taken on much of the refugees from the port and bringing them together here in the cove for question and inquiry.

Of course, neither Sao Feng nor Charles Vane were among those who were collected. Feng had escaped during the battle, and Vane had presumably done so as well. This didn't sit well with Jack. He told his father everything that Sao Feng had done, demanding that the pirate lord be captured and held accountable for his egregious transgressions.

Teague, though in agreement that Sao had broken the Code, was slow to seek justice. Singapore was ever more secluded, and was amassing a fleet of its own. Teague would have to bring many of the other lords together in agreement if they were to pursue this course, and at the moment, that was not likely.

The Misty Lady had won the day, rescued many of the fleeing ships and managed to sink and evade the galleon that had sought to end them. But this only meant they would be hunted far more aggressively now, once word got out what had happened. They needed to lie low, recoup their losses and find a new strategy.

This wasn't good enough for Jack. He toyed with the large jade ring on his thumb as he watched the sunrise, deep circles under his eyes, a heavy tired ache in his body. He'd not been sleeping much, or eating either. Almost every second that he was not arguing with Teague, he was sitting at Hector's bedside, waiting and watching. The ship's surgeon had done all he could for the man, repairing the tears that had been caused during their battle to escape. But despite this, Hector had lost an alarming amount of blood. It was not certain if he would recover, and Teague seemed to think the man likely of slipping away in his sleep.

Jack would not accept this. Not until Hector was cold and lifeless in his arms was going to let him go.

He glanced behind him, attempting to rub the burning dryness from his eyes and saw that Barbossa was just where he had left him. Jack left the doorway and moved back towards him in the darkness of the shack, settling back on the stool next to him and putting his head down on the bed beside him. Hector was still warm, still breathing. For the moment that would suffice. Sparrow closed his eyes and put his hand over top of Barbossa's long fingers. "You'd better wake up soon,

you bugger..." he mumbled tiredly. "Lying around on a beach is all well and good, but it gets frightfully boring after awhile...especially with all these other crusty old sods standing around, arguing and spitting about what's to be done. We could be off on an adventure, going after that gold..."

There was no answer of course and Jack felt his eyes sting again as he fought back the urge to cry, frustrated, exhausted and falling further into despair. "I'd trade it all if you'd just wake up. Every single coin." He chuckled, "I must be mad."

He started to drift off back to sleep, when he felt something twitch and curl under his hand. Long fingers laced themselves between his and squeezed.

Jack lifted himself abruptly, sleep forgotten, eyes wide. Hector was looking up at him with a vaguely glazed stare. "Jack?"

"You're not dead." The statement was one of muted shock.

Barbossa blinked slowly, feeling stiff and sore. "Yes well...I'm not so sure of that." He mumbled. "I'm parched..."

Shaken from his shock, Sparrow nodded, jumped up from his place on the stool and rushed over to where the drinking water bucket was and brought it to Barbossa's bedside, handing him the ladle and letting him drink his fill.

Jack watched him in silent fascination until Hector turned his eyes on him again, "Why are ye staring at me like that? Ye look like you've seen a ghost." He reached up and touched the man's tan face, brushing his thumb over one of Jack's high cheekbones. "Ye look awful."

Sparrow laughed, kissed his hand then fell on him, kissing him hungrily. Hector accepted the gesture enthusiastically, though he was slightly startled by the passion Jack displayed. They stayed locked together for a long moment, Barbossa pulling Jack onto the mattress with him, turning on his side to let the man press close to him.

Finally Jack let the redhead come up for air, smiling and lying forehead to forehead with him.

"Now, if I didn't know any better Jack, I'd say you missed me."

"Perhaps a little. I've grown accustomed to your salty face." The dark-haired man nodded, kissing him again quickly. He looked at the ring upon his thumb again. "That was quite the stunt you pulled. How did you know he would stop?"

"I didn't. But I know Sao well...when he takes an oath, he doesn't break it lightly."

Jack nodded and began to remove it, but Hector stopped him, slipping it back into place. "You keep it. It's said to protect the one who's most precious to you."

Jack's face flushed red and he flashed Barbossa a wicked smile. "Are you saying I'm precious to you?"

"Don't make me regret it, Sparrow." The taller man warned, nipping him lightly on the jaw. Jack nuzzled him and pulled him in close, tucking Hector under his chin and curled around him fully. They fell into a fitful doze in the early morning light, undisturbed by the rest of the world.

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A short while later found the pair walking along the beach, where many of the refugee sailors had taken up residence in tents and lean-tos while their ships were being repaired and their fates decided by the Keeper of the Code.

“How’s your mid-ship, mate?” Jack asked as they walked, letting Hector lean on him as he did so as the man was still stiff and sore and walked with a bit of a limp.

Barbossa rolled his eyes at the remark. “Sore, but I’m manage.”

They spotted Teague, surrounded by his first mate Tobias and a gaggle of other crew members, some familiar and some unknown. Teague glanced in their direction, then paused, forgotten whatever it was he was saying to the other crewman.

Tobes looked up too then and smiled in relief as they approached. The Code Keeper parted the crowd and sauntered towards them, his many necklaces and medallions swaying from his neck as he walked, heavy braids of hair pushed behind his shoulders in the sea breeze.

“Barbossa,” he said at length. “Jackie’s spent a good deal of time telling me of your exploits in Nassau.” His voice was grave and stern.

Hector bowed his head apologetically, “Captain, sir, I accept full responsibility for my actions, and any punishment yet see fit. It was never my intention to drag young Sparrow into danger.”

“Yes, well...I can not hold you solely at fault in this regard. I know my son too well. However, that does not change that you continued on this dangerous course, despite my orders and warnings. Not only this, but you have assaulted and provoked one of the nine pirate lords of the court, endangered my crew and my ship.”

“Aye, sir.”

“You also saved my son, rescued one of our allies, and exposed mutiny and corruption among our ranks. And,” he pulled from inside his frock coat the bit of parchment Jack had discovered. “helped acquire the coordinates to rather large sum of Spanish gold.”

Barbossa looked at Jack in confusion, who only shrugged faintly, and then looked back at the Captain.

“Sir?”

“I’d say that this will settle your debts nicely.” He gave the pair a dry smile. He put one of his heavily jeweled hands upon the man’s shoulder. “The Misty Lady would be happy to have you continue on. Unless of course, you have other plans?” he nodded to his left and the pair looked up the hill to see Mary Read stand there higher up on the dunes, speaking with other sailors.

For a moment Jack actually looked nervous, unsure of how Hector might answer. The tall redhead’s features were unreadable for a moment, and he said nothing. Then, taking a breath he turned back to Teague. “I believe I owe you my service, Captain Teague, sir. After all, I need to make up for the time lost during this, erm, escapade.”

Teague did smile then, though it was difficult to tell. “Very well. Welcome back aboard, Mr. Barbossa!”

Next to him Jack squeezed his hand, looking relieved.

The Captain caught this intimate little gesture and gave pause, silently raising one of his furrowed brows. Jack tensed and quickly let go of Hector’s hand, folding his arms behind his back.

The elder pirate said nothing to them, looking suspiciously between them for a long moment, then turned back to Tobes, pausing to tap him on shoulder, leaning close to his ear. “See that you keep an eye on those two. If anything seems amiss, report to me.”

“Aye sir.”

Teague went back to the waiting crew without further instruction, and made to follow, looking back at Jack long enough to give him a look of warning. But Sparrow, well versed in Ol’ Tobes familiar “guilty looks”, simply smiled wide eyed and innocently.

“Well if there isn’t anythin’ else, we’ll be on our way. Ta!” he looped arms with Hector and hastily turned away, moving upwards on the dunes where Mary stood.

“What was that about?” Hector wondered.

“Nothing,” Jack insisted quickly, “He’s a strange ol’ man, goes all quiet and mean like that from time to time for no reason at all usually. Best just stay out of his way until it passes, that’s how I get by.”

They met Mary at the top of the hill, and she rushed them, looking indeed overjoyed to see Hector up and moving about. The woman hugged them both hard. She looked a bit different now, her ruined skirts and bodice replaced by men’s breaches, tunic and vest, her hair tied up tight and tucked beneath a tri-corner hat. She was much more “Mark” than “Mary” then, but just as lovely and dashing.

“My brave lads! What an adventure you’ve had, eh?”

“I wouldn’t call that an adventure,” Hector replied tiredly. “More like a disaster.”

“Oh I dunno, mate. It had all the classics, a noble quest, treasure, dangerous villains, a host of obstacles, a few comical missteps, a damsel in distress—“

“Watch yer tongue.” Mary warned.

“I meant him,” Jack teased, poking Hector, who swatted at him in reply. “And of course, a valiant rescue by the hero.”

Both Mary and Hector shook their heads at the youth.

“Jack Sparrow, ye be trouble walking around on two legs. But I’m grateful for you.” Read replied.

“Think nothing of it, mate. We owe you our lives, myself especially. I would have been done for long ago if you hadn’t scooped me out of that hornet’s nest, showed me those tunnels. Not to mention the way you mastered the helm during that fight! Was breathtaking! Shame poor Hector here missed the whole thing.”

“Alas, I agree.” Hector nodded.

“I’m only glad to help.” She replied, pushing his wind-swept hair from his face. “So, Hector. Or is it Barbossa now, as I hear? The name is quite fetching. Fearsome even,” she smiled at his faint embarrassment and continued, “I’m gathering a crew and setting course for yer mother’s home in Ireland. She still has safe haven there, and it’s the only lead I have to her whereabouts. Will you be joining me?”

His eyes fell, “I’m sorry, Mary. I don’t think that’s the right course for me just now. I’ve...made other arrangements.”

Her smile paled, but didn’t fail and she nodded in understanding. “Of course. All things considered, I think that may indeed be the best course for you now. You can’t spend your life chasing the past, right?” She looked up then, as if realizing something. “Oh! Before I go off...” she reached into the satchel that hung from her shoulder and waist, and pulled from the pack a swath of golden, calico cloth.

Hector stared at it as she pressed it into his hands. “It’s from one of your father’s old coats. He was always tearing them, and I was the one left to mend them. It’s not much, but it’ll make a decent sash, or something more useful should you choose. I thought you should have it.”

He ran the smooth material through his fingers as though it were pure spun gold. “Thank you.”

She hugged him and kissed him again.

Jack stood awkwardly aside and let them have their moment before the woman was called for by another sailor further above them near the rest of the make-shift port town. When she’d said her final goodbyes and turned, making her way back up the hill, Jack put his arm around Barbossa again.

“You alright, luv?”

He nodded, taking the fabric and fixing it around his waist with some help from the other man.

“It suits you.” Jack said, thoroughly impressed. Behind them, the sun was growing high overhead and the sparkle of it on the water was blinding. “We should head back to the shack, get you fed and watered. Captain will want to be making way soon and you need to be ship-shape by then! Last thing you want is to have to spend your time cooped up below decks.”

Barbossa nodded as they began their trek back towards the shaded palms where their camp was. “Ye know, Jack, I think ye forgot one important part of your heroic tale.”

“Oh?”

“Well ye didn’t exactly make off with any treasure, since Teague seems to have taken whatever spoils it was you found.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say that.” He waited until they were farther away from prying eyes and ears, and then produced a bit of leather from the purse upon his belt, which he unrolled to show Hector as they stood together under the shade of a palm. “I just so happen to have scratched down those coordinates what yer father laid out so neatly in that old bit of parchment he hid. Including the bit that I gave to Vane. I figure the Captain can have whatever spoils he finds from the other two ports, but that one—that one’s ours, love. All we have to do is beat Vane to it.”

“Yer insane.” Hector chuckled at the mad genius of it all. “So I guess this means ye got yer treasure after all.”

“Aye, I did.” Jack pulled him in and kissed him again and Hector smiled against his lips, pulling the man close.

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Fini

## Chapter End Notes

Well I went full on sappy ending with this, but ah, no regrets. I hope you guys enjoyed reading this as much as I enjoyed writing it, thank you soooo much for all your comments I enjoyed every one of them I love talking to you guys and hearing your reactions and input!

No worries, young Jack and Hector will be back for more adventures soon, and in the mean time I will be working on a Dead Men Tell No Tales AU for you to enjoy!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!